

Adrift

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Summary: Frankenstein finds himself stumbling over an old, haunted mansion while on the run from a criminal organisation - a modern remix.

1. Chapter 1

It all started with an innocuous advertisement in the local newspaper while he was staying at a hotel in Princetown. England wasn't the choice destination for a holiday in his opinion â€" a little too expensive when he was on a run, but better here than wandering the forests of Eastern Europe, utterly lost. Though, he supposed, sipping tea and glancing out of the window that looked over to the Dartmoor Prison, he might have to go there after all if the Organisation kept on pursuing him.

He closed the newspaper with a sigh and drained the rest of his tea. It sounded too good to be true, this proposition, and Frankenstein was a cautious, methodical man. Would it be worth a risk to take a jaunt to the countryside, working as a mere caretaker in an old mansion? It would be secluded enough to suit his purpose and he could even â€"

Well, no use wondering idly when he could just as well go and take a look. It wasn't as if he had much to do in any case.

The ad had given a London address for contact purposes, but no local address appended in case there was someone willing to take up the job. He went down and used a public telephone for calling the London office, and was greeted by a cheerful-sounding receptionist. He remembered to put on his best posh accent â€" he wasn't English, but he had enough skills to masquerade as one â€" and had a short conversation with her. Yes, he had called the right place, and yes, there was an opening for the job of managing the estate of a certain person. Yes, it was located in Devon itself and yes, he would need to contact the local address to get further information.

Frankenstein brought up the GPS app in his phone to mark the correct location of local office, by the name of Emsworth Holdings Inc. Frankenstein had raised an eyebrow at the name; it seemed to crawl straight out of a Wodehouse book, though he doubted it would be anything like _that_.

It wasn't too far, so he chose to walk and was there fifteen minutes before appointment time. The office was built into an old building and the street was mostly deserted around it, giving Frankenstein a feeling of foreboding. The sun had sunken a little lower and the sky started turning crimson, announcing the herald of a chilly winter evening. He drew his coat tighter around himself and stepped on the stairs, deciding to enter even though he was a little early. It couldn't hurt â€" it wasn't as if the business was booming. It was quiet, very quiet.

The door was made of expensive wood when he got to the door of the office. He knocked on it and it was opened, leading him into an opulent interior, lit with ambient lighting that gave the impression as if he'd set foot into the pages of history instead of the office of a realtor. There was only one man there: aged and slightly bent, but his eyes gleamed with shrewdness and Frankenstein didn't miss the calculation that passed through them the moment he set them upon his face.

"Mr. Frank Lee, is it?" He inquired, stepping aside to let Frankenstein enter.

"Yes, I called your London office."

"Yes, yes, do come in."

Frankenstein did as bade and stepped on the plush Persian rug, feeling his shoes sink into the softness. There were two red high-backed chairs near the fireplace with a table in between them. A decanter rested on the polished surface of the wood, with two whiskey tumblers next to it. The walls were lined with bookshelves and there was a proper table and chairs on one side, but the man did not head for that. Instead, he picked his way to one of the comfortable looking chairs and took a seat, gesturing for Frankenstein to do the same.

He poured for both of them and slid the glass towards Frankenstein, taking a generous sip from his own and sighed. "To be honest, Mr. Lee, I'm glad you turned up today. I was beginning to lose hope that I'd ever get to settle this matter."

Frankenstein tasted the liquor, acknowledging silently that it was good (and probably not poisoned) and tilted his head a little in question.

"As you can see, this is no normal job interview. There is a house here up in Dartmoor that belongs to a gentleman that I work for. He has moved to the States a while back and the management of his estate has fallen into my hands. I'm getting on in the years, as you can no doubt see." He smiled deprecatingly. "I need someone young and hardworking who can go live there in my stead."

"I see," Frankenstein said. "This is still highly unusual."

"Oh, there is a contract, and I do need your information and resume, you see, but I need to know you personally before I can even get to the paperwork."

"Personally?" He asked. He needed a hideout, a place to rest and fade away from the public life for a while, and this sounded like a golden opportunity, but Frankenstein wasn't an idiot. He didn't want to walk from one trap into another.

"The gentleman I work for is very dear to me and I don't want to leave his home into the hands of a man I can't even trust," the old man answered, taking another sip and looking at the fireplace. It wasn't lit, so that must be an ingrained habit.

"And you couldn't find the locals to do it for you?"

The old man glanced at him, eyes sharp. "No, because they are a superstitious lot and would do anything to avoid it. I'll be upfront with you, Mr. Lee, there are many rumours surrounding that place and if you choose to go live there, a many people will try to dissuade you. You mustn't let it bother you."

"I don't believe in superstition, but I find that there's usually something when people talk, even if they are mistaken."

"Quite, quite," the old man agreed readily enough. "The house I'm about to send you to is rather isolated, and was once the scene of a rather gruesome massacre, back in the medieval times. Before that, a lot of people used to live in the surrounding areas, but now, none are left. It's eerie, so people talk."

Frankenstein lifted his glass and took a draught. On the face of it, everything seemed to be all right, but his gut screamed at him. He finished his drink and gave the man in front of him a slow smile. "That's fine," he said, decided. "I don't mind a job like that. I'm not easily shaken anyway â€" this might be the perfect work for me."

"Excellent," the man grinned, tossed his head back to empty his drink as well.

The meeting was over half an hour later after Frankenstein handed over his (forged) papers and Mr. Emsworth â€" for that was his name â€" looked them over. Things went quickly afterwards: Frankenstein was to start working within a week, his pay was good enough to raise eyebrows but Mr. Emsworth insisted. A car would escort him to his new house and he would get necessary supplies every week through the same. Their contract covered a period of twelve months, and it could be renewed annually subsequently.

It was ridiculously simple and Frankenstein allowed it to happen. He half-expected to stumble on the base of some criminal organisation operating in the bowels of his new house. If so, he was going to have fun uprooting them. It would serve as a good learning experience when he had to inevitably face the men he was running from.

Therefore, that evening when he stepped out into the streets of Princetown, Frankenstein found himself full of a sense of self-satisfaction. Emsworth might have thought he had Frankenstein eating out of the palm of his hand, but that wasn't the case. And

soon, he hoped, it would be the other way round.

* * *

><p>The car picked him up at nine sharp, and the woman who billed him at the counter gave him a consternated look. He had stayed in the hotel long enough to get friendly with the staff, and he knew that he was easy on the eyes, prompting enough female (and occasional male) attention to facilitate conversation. They knew where he was heading off to, and none of them seemed to approve. Frankenstein, however, was a student of science and as such, he had a natural disinclination towards believing in the paranormal.<p>

"It's okay, Lydia," he said soothingly, counting his change and pocketing it. "One year isn't a long time, and I'm allowed to come back for a visit then."

She sniffled a little, turning away, and Frankenstein took that as a cue to leave. He picked up his suitcase â€" the only piece of luggage he owned on this island â€" and walked out of the tiny hotel he'd called his home for the better part of this month.

It was a quaint and old little vehicle: a CitroÃ«n probably, but he couldn't be sure and he wasn't concerned enough to ask about it. It was, however, a little troublesome to get into it. The suitcase went in the back and the chauffeur drove away without a single comment once he was properly seated. Frankenstein tried to make idle conversation, but the man didn't even seem to hear it, so he resisted further urges and sat back, watching the scenery drift away.

Princetown faded from view soon enough and the path grew more and more hilly, though the altitude never rose much. Frankenstein could feel his ears pop a little every time they climbed higher. As far as he could see, there were crags and tors, grasslands in the distance, and probably the bogs he'd heard so much about. He could see tiny rivers cutting through the land far away, bleeding life into the rocky earth and causing greenery to spout along its banks.

Clouds drifted lazily along the horizon, stealing away precious sunlight and soon the wind grew chilly. Frankenstein rolled the window up and settled back into his seat, closing his eyes for a while. His mind wanted to dwell on the past, now that he felt a little bit secure in his safety. He had imagined that Emsworth might be an agent of the Organisation, but why would he lure Frankenstein away to a deserted place? He could have poisoned Frankenstein the day they'd met. Why go through so much trouble when they had already located him?

Still. He had covered his tracks well, but even this driver could be a hired gun. Anybody could be. Frankenstein breathed softly through his mouth and closed his eyes tighter. It didn't pay to be so paranoid. He didn't want to die â€" not because he was afraid, no. He wanted to take these people down. They had lured him and his mind into working for them, and then he'd realised just how misguided he had been. His brilliance had been exploited and â€"

The car came to an abrupt stop and jolted Frankenstein out of his thoughts. He blinked and looked out of the window. They were smack in the middle of nowhere, and there was a horse carriage standing a little away from where he sat. Frankenstein blinked again, because

the last he checked, this wasn't the nineteenth century.

"You've to go the rest of the way in that," the driver said at length in a thick accent. "Get off."

Frankenstein ambled out of the car in a daze, barely even noticing that the driver had chucked his suitcase out too. He turned around when he noticed the hum of the car's engine and watched it drive away. The carriage still stood there like a sentinel and its driver had a hat that obscured his face from view. Frankenstein had liked his gothic literature just as much as any other, but he had no idea when he'd shifted genres from crime thriller to gothic horror.

"Are you going to stand there all day?" The coachman rumbled then, startling Frankenstein.

"No, sorry," Frankenstein replied and picked up his suitcase. The carriage was made of wood and it had no windows. So now Frankenstein had no way of knowing where he would be going. A sliver of regret started to worm its way through his heart, making it heavy in his chest even as he clambered inside and shut the door.

The coachman opened the little window at his end and peered at him, giving him a gap-toothed smile peeking from between his bushy beard. "Strap in, lad. We're in for the long ride."

"How long will it take?" Frankenstein checked his watch in the dim light. It was almost one in the afternoon.

"We'll get there about nightfall is all I can say." That said, the man shut the window and the carriage became dark.

Frankenstein opened his mouth, then thinking better of it, closed it and settled in for a nap. He could have escaped this any time he wanted, but where would he go in this wilderness anyway? Whether for good or for bad, he'd taken his chance and wherever that took him, he would deal with it.

2. Chapter 2

True to his word, the coachman deposited him at the gates of an old but imposing looking manor at moonrise. The manor looked more like a castle from where he stood, surrounded by a dense patch of trees and an old moat — it had been filled in a long time ago. There was a large iron gate that kept something out, or something in, it was hard to tell just yet. Frankenstein yawned and stretched a little, barely paying attention to the galloping of the horses as the carriage drove away, almost immediately. That man did not wish to linger.

No matter. He had the keys to the place and so he unlocked it. Couldn't be worse than what he'd already been through, so what if he was going into a spooky castle at night? It was hard to be scared when he'd seen the depths of depravity humanity was capable of. What could a ghost or a demon do to him that his fellow men hadn't done already?

He picked up his suitcase once he'd unlocked the door and began walking to the front door. It had to be at least half a mile from the gates and it gave him time to appreciate the natural beauty of the

place. The woods looked black in the faint moonlight and he could hear the soft sounds of life from within it. If something unnatural dwelled here, it did not harm the animals and insects. That was good to know.

By the time he reached the front door, Frankenstein realised that he'd psyched himself into buying into the entire supernatural beings haunting the place. He shook his head " he had better things to be concerned about than some old wives' tale. Though, he supposed, if he had the time to be paranoid about this, that meant he was feeling a lot more safe from the Organisation.

Frankenstein smiled and pushed his way inside, shutting the door behind him. A single lamp was burning on the wall and it was only then that he realised that there was no electricity here. He stared at his phone in dismay. How long had the previous landlord been gone that the power was switched off? Frankenstein pursed his lips and walked further in, only to realise that there had never even been any installation of electric wiring or any bulbs and such.

It gave him a pause.

This was a little more complicated than he had previously assumed then. He wasn't allowed to leave the grounds for an entire year, so there was no way he could get the place electrified. He brought his phone up again and weighed his choices. There was no one he could contact, or would want to, anyway, so what was the point. He turned it off and pocketed it, venturing further inside.

The house was...filthy.

There was at least a few kgs of dust settled on every horizontal surface, and it had burrowed into every available crevice and curve of the furniture. He could see cobwebs in every corner and the wallpaper had faded into an indistinguishable pattern a long time ago.

This was a _nightmare_.

He could feel a deep itch starting just below his skin at the idea of all this dirt and filth. That old man wasn't wrong: he had been completely incapable of taking care of one house! He placed one hand on his nose and mouth and trudged onwards, picking up a lamp that was lying nearby. He lit it up and climbed the grand stairs just in front of him. The foyer had only the stairs and a few doors to the sides of it, probably entry points for the servants of the house, and he was one now, wasn't he?

Shrugging, he continued upstairs. Dust billowed from the carpet with every step he took and he added it to his mental list of to-do things. Ghosts and demons vanished from his mind and the entire focus was now centred on his true enemy: absence of cleanliness.

He opened one of the doors and saw a fairly decent sized room, complete with a bed and large window to look out of. He placed his suitcase to the side, took his shirt off and tied it around his mouth and nose and then tackled the bed first. Taking off the sheets, he closed his eyes to let the dust settle. He pushed the sheets down, bundled them up and put them to the side. He patted the mattress down until he was sufficiently satisfied. He threw the pillows down on the

same pile and laid down, feeling unexpectedly exhausted.

It had been a long day, and that wasn't even counting the bizarre method of getting here. He had become a regular Jonathan Hawker at this point. Now, if only some creepy vampire was living here, the universe would achieve perfect symmetry.

* * *

><p>The next day had him scrambling for cleaning supplies (there were some, not adequate, but they would do), food (the pantry was well-stocked) and water (there was a well in the back of the house and all equipment for drawing water was well in place). All of it looked freshly placed, so Frankenstein wondered if someone was asked to prepare for his stay here. Was it the shady coachman? The reticent chauffeur? Or Emsworth himself?<p>

Or maybe he had even more people at his bidding, arranging supplies in the middle of nowhere but not bothering to _clean up a little_.

Fuming a little, Frankenstein worked his way through the morning, having had a small breakfast of bread and cheese. By the time evening arrived, he was sweaty, grimy and more than a little ravenous. It was sad that he had to draw water from the well to take a bath, then heat it himself over a coal stove. Somewhere along the way, he had stopped feeling like he was living in the present and found himself contained a little pocket of space where time had stopped around the middle-ages.

He dined on cold meat sandwiches and struggled not to fall asleep on the dining table. Still, he had made good progress with the cleaning, so the fatigue he felt was the good kind. And he had found spare linen and upholstery in the cupboards, so it wasn't a total loss. He had explored the entire left side of the castle. It was huge, yes, but that generally meant a lot of large rooms and not a lot of small rooms.

Small mercies, he thought around a mouthful of bread.

There wasn't even a hint of modernisation around the house. And there really was nothing around for _miles and miles_. He could see the remains of huts from times gone by and surmised that this must have been what Emsworth had meant. He hadn't felt like exploring them yet, however.

Once his dinner was finished, he snuffed out the candle and walked upstairs to his room where fresh sheets awaited his weary body. He was carrying a little lamp with him, and that was why he stopped short of running into a small figure at the top of the stairs.

Frankenstein did not shriek or drop his lamp, but it was a near thing. He brought his lamp up with shaky fingers, trying desperately not to think of a certain game he had played a few years ago where the protagonist was stuck carrying a little lamp of his own through a spooky manor.

The weak yellow glow of the lamp illuminated the spectre soon enough, however, and Frankenstein was glad to know that it wasn't some

deformed monster, but a child. A child no more than ten years old, pale as the moon and almost wraith-like. His eyes seemed to glow crimson in the lamplight. Frankenstein lowered the lamp and shadows engulfed the child's face once again.

It had been a terribly beautiful face, beset by melancholy.

Something inside Frankenstein's chest ached and he clutched at his lamp, wondering how a child could have wandered in here? There was no way he was some kid squatting " he was dressed too nicely for that " and he couldn't be an actual inhabitant. That left only one alternative...

"Uh," he began uncertainly.

"You're staying in my room," the child spoke in a soft voice.

Frankenstein raised the lamp again. There was no anger or petulance on his face, only a faint line of distress around his mouth.

"Ah, forgive me, I did not know." He had no idea how to navigate this situation anymore.

The child turned around, apparently satisfied and seemed to melt into the shadows. When Frankenstein extended his hand and the lamp with it, there was no sign of him. There weren't even footsteps on the ground where the child had stood. Feeling cold all over, Frankenstein rushed to the room and took his belongings out of it. He'd rather sleep on a dusty mattress again than deal with disembodied children.

His heart refused to calm down even as he buried his face in his arms and lay very, very still on the mattress. So were the rumours true then? There really was a ghost here? But it had not tried to harm him in any way. It hadn't even appeared until it had noticed Frankenstein's intentions to violate its sanctuary another day in a row. It had been gracious enough to let Frankenstein sleep in its bed.

Could it be called an evil spirit when it had not harmed Frankenstein so far? Spirits were not bound to human nature of trickery and deceit. Or so he told himself, at any rate.

The next day's dawn brought with it frost and wind picking up speed, and Frankenstein felt completely not rested. He could barely sleep last night and he was wary of going outside and resuming his activities. What if the child resented his attempts to clean this place up?

But what if the child had liked him cleaning up the place?

Impossible to guess " best to get to work. Frankenstein dragged himself out of bed and had a small breakfast; he didn't have the appetite for more just now. His enthusiasm was certainly dampened. He did not see the child again, though he had made sure to explore every room. Even the one he'd been evicted from. He had remained only long enough to clean it up more thoroughly before hightailing it out of

there.

The remaining days of that week passed by idly and by the time the coachman returned with supplies, Frankenstein had made the castle nearly spotless. There were things he couldn't fix: like the wallpaper in the foyer. It was the only place that was relatively modernised, and even that must have been sometime in the nineteenth century or thereabouts.

He walked to the gate where the coachman was unloading the supplies. Frankenstein watched in silence awhile, before he felt that he might as well bring the subject up.

"There is a kid living here."

The coachman paused and gave him a look from the corner of his eye, most of his face still obscured by the hat and now with the addition of a muffler, wrapped around his mouth. All he could see were his eyes, and they too were concealed by the shadows.

"Is he a ghost?" Frankenstein pressed when the coachman refused to be forthcoming on his own.

The coachman paused momentarily, and then spoke, "I do not know of such things."

Frankenstein wanted to call bullshit on that, but his situation was tenuous at best here and he wouldn't want to anger his only link to humanity. Not if he wanted to make requests of this man.

The coachman handed him the last of the bags, but he didn't turn around to leave as quickly as he had before. He tugged on the rim of his hat and gave Frankenstein a meditative look. "Nothing evil dwells in this place," he stated as if it was a matter of fact and nodded.

"That's really good to know," Frankenstein said, thinking that the sarcasm in his voice could probably cut through butter like a hot knife, but the coachman wasn't fazed. He tipped his hat and walked away, his business concluded and left Frankenstein to his devices again.

Frankenstein was unable to gain any insight into this strange job, but one thing was confirmed: there really was something here, even though he hadn't seen it since. He would have thought that the child had been a figment of his overwrought imagination, but as the coachman said, there was something in the house, despite the fact that he did not perceive it as evil.

Well, Frankenstein reasoned, carrying the supplies back to the house, he wouldn't have appreciated waking up to some vampire sucking the blood out of him, or being seduced and eaten by an incubus while he wasn't looking.

3. Chapter 3

Frankenstein came awake with a start, his body drenched with sweat and his heart beating a mile a minute. His face smarted and when he swiped his finger against his cheeks, it came off wet. He sat up

slowly, rubbing a hand over his chest and trying to control his breathing. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth unpleasantly and cold was beginning to seep in through his clothes. Burying his face in his hands, he let out a small groan, ignoring the sting of his wounds. It hadn't happened for a while, and therefore he was at a loss for what to do. So he just sat there, motionless and hugging his knees with a bruising grip.

And he would have continued in this vein for a while yet, had it not been for a faint sound of the door unlocking and the room getting flooded with lamplight from the corridor. Frankenstein raised his head, perplexed, and saw that it was the wispy child, hovering at the threshold. His face was once again hidden in the darkness, but Frankenstein could see the crimson of his eyes, glowing faintly.

"S-sorry," Frankenstein said, feeling his heartbeat pick up again. "Did I disturb you?"

The child shook his head and stepped inside, shutting the door behind him with his will alone. Frankenstein swallowed. The child kept on walking until he was right next to Frankenstein's bed, holding a glass of water that Frankenstein hadn't noticed before. He thrust it out in Frankenstein's direction, a slightly hopeful expression on his face. Perplexed, but not ungrateful, Frankenstein took the water and downed it in one go. He had been really thirsty.

"Thank you," he murmured and took a deep, calming breath.

The child blinked at him and then in front of Frankenstein's very eyes, he started to become less substantial. Fading right into the air. Almost impulsively, Frankenstein reached out and grabbed the child's arm "it felt very real in his palm" and stopped him from leaving.

Frankenstein had had time to consider the matter at length. The child "this creature" seemed to dwell within this castle, but it hadn't lifted a single finger to harm Frankenstein in any manner. Whether it "he approved of Frankenstein's attempts to clean the place up, he didn't know. He hadn't bothered to stop it, so Frankenstein could interpret it in his favour. And now the child had brought him a glass of water" an attempt to soothe him, perhaps, when Frankenstein was in considerable distress. He could not parse it any other way than _this_.

"Wait," he said gently, squeezing that soft arm within his grasp.

The figure solidified within moments and curious red eyes looked up at him, waiting patiently. Frankenstein let the arm go and folded his hands in his lap. He had great many questions, but he did not deem them important to ask just yet. He also needed to focus on anything other than his nightmares. Anything at all. So:

"What's your name?"

The child seemed to consider this before answering, "...Raizel."

What a strange name, thought Frankenstein but refrained from

commenting, since he had no right to say that to someone else. "My name," he said instead, "is Frank â€" Frankenstein." It seemed foolish to lie to this entity, and who knew, if he could read his mind or find out through other means, he might just get angry. "I used to have a different name in the past, but it was taken from me. I gave myself a new name in place of what they had forced upon me."

"My true name was also taken from me," Raizel replied in a solemn voice. "So I took a new one, as well."

Emotion swelled within Frankenstein's throat and he felt a deep urge to reach out and grasp that thin arm again. He found a kindred spirit here, so far from home (_but where was home_), and one that wasn't even human.

A forgotten relic of the past this child had to be, abandoned and left to wander alone here for who knew how long? It was pitiable. It made Frankenstein want to reach out and hold the child close, because wasn't that what human instincts dictated? Protecting smaller, adorable things that needed it? Raizel was small, swallow-skinned and thin-limbed, and all his edges were blurring, as if he was slowly vanishing, becoming more transient by the minute. If this child was a demon, he was surely a very miserable one.

"You should rest," Raizel said abruptly, voice cleaving through the silence that had fallen.

Had he sensed Frankenstein's thoughts? And if he could, was he also able to see what was hidden inside Frankenstein's heart? His memories? Could he tell why Frankenstein had woken up in the middle of the night, his face all scratched-up by his own hands? He should be angered by such a gross violation of his privacy, but all he could muster was hollow grief. The child averted his eyes: a token admission of his guilt, perhaps?

Frankenstein sighed and lied down, covering his eyes with his arm and ignored the lingering presence in his room. It soon dissolved into nothingness and sleep claimed Frankenstein, but this time he was no longer plagued by his nightmares.

He woke up next morning, aching and drained, just not as much as usual. When things got bad, Frankenstein would end up unable to sit up and do anything even remotely normal for hours after waking up. So there was a plus side having an inhuman entity reading your mind and distracting you from your personal demons.

He chuckled mirthlessly and sat up, preparing himself for another day of endless chores. At least they would help him take his mind off other, more unpleasant things. Shrugging on fresh clothes, he went through his morning ablutions and then made his way downstairs to the kitchen area.

Sunlight was already streaming in from the opened windows and the air smelled like fresh frost, tingling his nose. He took a deep, refreshing breath and rolled his sleeves up, prepared to clean up the kitchen further and then make himself a quick meal. However, as soon as he ventured further into the spacious interior of the kitchen, he noticed a small figure lurking in a shadowed corner. The unfamiliarity of that made Frankenstein's heart race momentarily

until realisation dawned. He took a quick breath and tried not to glower at the diminutive figure.

However, the child " Raizel " looked so sorry that Frankenstein's anger drained from his mind pretty much instantly, replacing it with sadness. It wasn't this child's fault that he was so broken, was it? He shouldn't be taking it out on him, of all the things. The smile came to him then, unfabricated, and he bent down next to him and bit his lip.

"You can read my mind, can't you?" He asked, choosing to be straightforward. It couldn't hurt, not at this point.

Raizel nodded " a tiny motion and his eyes clouded with remorse, making Frankenstein's stomach wrench.

"Can't help it?"

Another hesitant nod and Raizel backed away, as if he was afraid of what Frankenstein " a human " would think of him. Why did he care so much?

If Frankenstein was honest with himself " and he mostly was " he had long known that his life had somehow careened wildly off-path somewhere along the way when he was in his teens. His desperate attempts to liken it to other, more comprehensible things always gave him something to anchor himself to. This, however, had no parallel to anything he could think of, and he felt stumped and helpless, and as such, unable to formulate a correct plan of action. There was something so fragile and helpless about this particular existence, and Frankenstein had no idea how to comfort it. That was his first instinct when it came to Raizel, after all. A desire to shield and soothe.

How strange that it took a non-human creature to awaken his long-forgotten humanity.

* * *

><p>Frankenstein prepared a simple meal of meat and bread, complemented by cheese and tea for breakfast, his appetite rejuvenated all of a sudden. Crimson eyes watched him from the chair in the middle of the room, placed behind the giant wooden table where the countless servants from the days gone by must have worked. He had tugged on Raizel's hand and asked him to join for a meal, and his request had not been denied, much to his delight.<p>

He had not paused to ask whether Raizel could eat, but since he hadn't refused, Frankenstein felt safe enough to cook for two. He placed the food in front of Raizel first and then took a seat next to him, digging into his portion quietly. Raizel followed suit, watching him with curious eyes and then mimicking his actions perfectly, but with far more elegance than what Frankenstein could have displayed himself.

They took their meal in complete silence and Frankenstein was gratified to note that Raizel had not left anything behind. He had cleaned his plate like a good child and cradled the teacup elegantly in his small hand, drinking it with great interest, glancing every now and then outside the window. Frankenstein had watched him out of

the corner of his eye the entire time, noting what he seemed to like more than the others, and it looked like that tea was an instant hit.

He filed the information away for later and gathered the plates to rinse them off. Then he prepared more tea in a teapot and placed it next to Raizel, refilling his cup first.

"If you want more, just pour more for yourself, okay?" He instructed, demonstrating by holding the handle and tilting a little to serve more of the hot liquid. Then he covered it with a thick cloth to retain its warmth. Oh, what wouldn't he give for a thermos or an electric kettle right now.

Raizel had watched him with rapt attention so far, and he gave another nod, showing that he had followed his lesson and resumed his tea drinking.

"If you run out of tea and still want more," Frankenstein continued, feeling something like affection swell within him. "Call for me, okay?"

"Okay." That elicited an answer and Frankenstein smiled at the child "who knew how long it had been since someone smiled at him?" before leaving him to it.

When Frankenstein was off polishing those large windows, he felt a renewed sense of energy, like a job well done and he often caught himself smiling at odd intervals at nothing in particular. How had one night changed so much? How had he gone from feeling vulnerable and exposed to wanting _this_?

He had to remember: the child was not truly a child. It must be centuries old, and it only held the appearance of a child. Maybe it was even an elaborate ruse to trick him into lowering his guard "but, he thought, to what end? He hadn't yet had any indication as to what Raizel was capable of, other than being able to walk around in shadows and read minds. The thought was sobering nonetheless and he raised his guard again, frowning at the loss of that good feeling from before.

He wrung out the dirty rag into the bucket nearby and then carried it back outside, throwing away the muddy water and refilling it again. The sun had climbed to its zenith by now and he should probably get started on lunch, since he did have another mouth to feed. If he had been by himself, he might have skipped the meal, but there was someone waiting for him...

Frankenstein made his way back to the kitchen and found Raizel exactly where he had left him, sitting on a small wooden chair, his attention totally captured by the window that opened into the garden, and the teacup held in his hands, still just as delicately. Frankenstein lifted the kettle, pleased despite himself to note that it was almost empty. He put the water on boil, found more tea leaves and set them aside, before preparing for lunch. Now that he wasn't alone, he wondered if he should ask for some fresh fruits from the coachman next time. Make some new things, experiment and find out what they liked best? He was a decent cook "he had lived on his own for quite some time, so it wouldn't be too difficult for him.

He could already feel the shift in his priorities, and though he tried to not feel affected by it, that was nearly impossible to do. He told himself that it was inevitable, that he would find something to occupy himself, even if it was babysitting something that was probably a demon. It couldn't be a ghost "ghosts didn't eat, did they?

"What are you?" The question was out of his mouth before he could stop himself. His hand paused over a carrot "he'd been planning to make a simple stew " and he glanced back to where Raizel was sitting, entirely too quiet.

Raizel tore his gaze from the window and regarded Frankenstein with a sombre look. It made him look old "much older than he was supposed to, and if it wasn't so sad, it would have definitely inflamed Frankenstein's suspicions. Raizel opened his mouth, closed it, and tried again as if he could not find the words.

Why was it that he was so convincing in his every action?

"Sorry, you don't have to tell me," Frankenstein said, turned away to focus on his carrot. "It's okay, it doesn't matter."

It did, just a little, but.

But.

"It bothers you," Raizel said softly. There was barely any strength behind it, and yet it carried over to Frankenstein with perfect clarity. There was pain behind it, tangible enough to cut right through his heart.

"Yes," he admitted and abandoned the carrot. The damn thing could wait and stop him from focusing on what was really important "here and now. "It bothers me, but it bothers you to tell me. So I think we're at an impasse. You don't have to tell me."

Raizel's brow wrinkled slightly. "It does not bother me. But I do not know how to explain."

"Well," Frankenstein wiped his hands on his apron and took a seat beside him, pouring himself a cup of tea too. "That's fair enough."

The ensuing silence in which they shared another cup of tea was rather companionable.

4. Chapter 4

They fell into a comfortable pattern from that day onwards. Frankenstein would wake up early, make breakfast for Raizel who was always waiting for him in the kitchen. Then he would make tea for both of them and take it outside in the garden "the garden he has been tending to " and they would have tea there. They didn't speak a lot: the child was reticent by nature and Frankenstein liked the peace and quiet just fine. He could relax here, feel safe and warm in the wintry sunlight every single day "he had never known such a thing before.

As for Raizel, all Frankenstein could say about that was that he looked more solid these days. His figure had been translucent to look upon before, but not so much anymore. As if having someone around had breathed life into him just as it had done in Frankenstein's world.

Other than that, his only connection the human world was that enigmatic coachman. Frankenstein had made several requests of him and most of them had been granted, too. A battery-powered cell phone charger was denied, but the desire to have pens and journals to write things down was accepted. Fresh fruits and chocolate were supplied in ample quantities. Newspapers were not. Books were acceptable, but a radio wasn't. Not that Frankenstein wished to listen to radio, per se, but he had made several random requests to identify a pattern.

He was a prisoner in all but name. It wasn't difficult to see that they wanted to keep him as isolated as possible, but for _what_. They were not a force associated with the Organisation, because again, Frankenstein wouldn't be drawing breath if they had been. Were they then a part of something that opposed the Organisation?

Once that idea took hold of his imagination, it was hard to shake off. It meant that they didn't have Frankenstein's best interests at heart; they just wanted to prevent him from falling into the hands of their enemies.

However, whenever he looked at Raizel's serene face, he felt that it didn't matter that much. He wasn't scared of death, oh no. There was something scarier than death and he was living it already, and if being with Raizel made that loss lose its edge, it was worth it.

It was so difficult to stay mad at the world when there was such peace around him, the calm permeating into his senses and soaking into his bones. Making him forget " and not in a bad way either.

* * *

><p>Frankenstein ventured outside one morning in October, and saw the carriage pull up to the gates. The gate was opened by the coachman " he had a key of his own " and the carriage drew to a halt next to him a few moments later. Frankenstein was about to greet the coachman that the gate of the carriage swung open, revealing a vaguely familiar face. Frankenstein frowned, trying to recall where he had previously seen this man. It was a striking face: dignified and regal, hard to forget.<p>

It struck him just as the man frowned back at the lack of courtesy from him. It was that silent chauffeur, just dressed in finer clothes! Frankenstein tried not to gape. Back then the man had been dressed in drab clothes, a faded tweed coat and nondescript trousers.

"Ah, it's " you. The guy who drove me from the hotel," he remarked, staring unabashedly at the new arrival. What had changed? Were they finally going to drop this ridiculous charade?

"Yes," the man replied and regarded him with a thinly-veiled sneer. He seemed easily displeased. "I haven't forgotten the way you chatted my ear off that time."

Frankenstein felt a little offended. "I did not."

"Now, now," the coachman lifted his hands in a placating gesture. "I have things to deliver, so if you two could lend me a hand?"

They turned away from each other reluctantly. Frankenstein had been itching for a fight for quite some time and this guy seemed like an easy target. However, he needed the coachman's cooperation still, so he pulled back. However, before they could do as was requested of them, soft footfalls sounded from behind Frankenstein, and a dark head peeked out to look at two men at their doorstep. The effect of his presence on them, Frankenstein noted with great interest, was momentous. They lost their carefully concealed masks and started, eyes wide and hands clenched as if they had never expected this.

Were they really not aware of his existence?

The chauffeur " what else could he call him at this point? It wasn't as if they had bothered to give him their names and Frankenstein hadn't either, as a consequence " was the first to step forward and bend down a little in a respectful bow. He said something in an unfamiliar language " the only thing Frankenstein understood was the word Raizel. So they did know. They had simply pretended not to know. They had stranded him in a haunted mansion with full knowledge of everything.

The thing was, Frankenstein wasn't even angry knowing this. Just a little annoyed.

"You shouldn't talk as if he's not here." Those were the first words Raizel spoke when the chauffeur was done speaking. "It's discourteous."

The man looked appropriately chastised.

"Forgive me," he said and turned to Frankenstein, giving him his full attention for the first time. "I have been incredibly rude when I had no reason to be. I hope you can forgive me " I had a hard time trusting you, but I can see that my worries were unfounded."

"Trusting me with what?"

"The job."

Frankenstein knew that he did not mean that at all. It wasn't until he saw the way they treated Raizel that he got a proper grasp on what his real job had been. He wasn't supposed to stay here to take care of some decrepit castle. No, he had been sent here to care for Raizel.

How many more had been sent here in the past for the same reason?

How many had abandoned Raizel at the first hint of something unnatural?

Somehow, he did not want to know. It seemed painful to even think about.

If there was one thing that truly bothered Frankenstein, it was that he had been tricked into caring for someone he would have had any way, if left to his own devices. He pursed his lips and breathed deeply, trying to not let it bother him. It shouldn't bother him as he had also planned to use Emsworth and co. to his own ends. If only sentimentality hadn't come into play...

Raizel's face was a little stricken when Frankenstein noticed him. No, it wasn't _Raizel's_ fault. He had chosen to care for Raizel by his own will, not because he had been manipulated into it. Raizel had taken the first steps towards him, and Frankenstein had repaid the favour. Raizel hadn't even asked for anything in return for his kind gesture " indeed, he hadn't expected anything from this human at all. He had just been kind.

And Frankenstein had been kind in turn. But then, it wasn't a transaction and they weren't trading something as pure as that around. No, not at all.

He smiled at Raizel and shook his head, letting him read his thoughts and see " an irrevocable proof " that whatever happened, Frankenstein harboured no ill-will towards Raizel.

Raizel's eyes lit up a little in response and lowered his gaze, satisfied. Frankenstein gave him a nod and walked back into the house. If Raizel wanted to talk to those two, he should be able to without worrying about Frankenstein's feelings. They seemed to care for him and that was _enough_. This place had really softened him up, hadn't it?

* * *

><p>So it made sense that it wasn't going to last.<p>

It had been around two months since he came here, and winter was in full swing by now. The trees were bare and all signs of life had disappeared from the thicket. He could rarely hear birds or insects around him. It was only November but the temperatures had been dropping steadily. It was a good thing that he had a few good warm clothes or else he'd be joining Raizel in the afterlife pretty soon.

Still, he kept fires going in the kitchen and his room, when he needed them. There was a lot of dry wood stored in the castle's storerooms, and for that he was grateful. It was a pain to carry them upstairs, several flights of stairs, but it was worth the trouble. Frankenstein missed centralised heating as much as he missed a properly functioning shower, but beggars couldn't be choosers.

And that was how he found himself, one cold afternoon, lugging several pieces of firewood upstairs. He had already chopped them and readied them for use, but transportation was always slow-going. The stairs were steep and poorly-lit, and a cold draft blew from some unknown opening in the walls. Frankenstein shivered slightly, cursed the lack of amenities for the millionth time and continued labouring.

The lights from the torches that illuminated the narrow passage went out with a soft _shhh_ sound " like a sigh from a disembodied

presence â€" and Frankenstein suddenly found himself stranded in total darkness. He gripped the firewood tighter and drew in a quick, startled breath.

And then all of a sudden, he was engulfed by an effluvia of rot, cloying and suffocating, and he gasped, letting go of the logs. They clattered to the floor, rolling over the steps and seemed to vanish entirely without making a single noise. Frankenstein was hyperventilating, aware that this couldn't be real, but even if it wasn't, it was still happening and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

So he ran. He forced his immobile legs into action, vaulting over multiple steps and he ran as if death itself were chasing him.

The floor fell out from underneath his legs and icy tendrils crept along his limbs, holding â€" securing him in place. He couldn't move, couldn't breathe and his heart was going to hammer straight out of his chest. He would choose falling down into the abyss over being suspended in the void, supported only by these dreadful things digging into his flesh, like severed hands grasping at him with bony fingers.

They were still crawling all over his body, sneaking under his clothes and tearing into his flesh. He didn't bleed â€" he had nothing left to bleed by now. Everything inside him had already been sucked dry. His bones ground against each other under the pressure and he struggled, enraged and terrified by the futility of it all.

He couldn't even scream.

'_Frankenstein_.'

He tried to turn his head, trying to reach the voice calling for him but the things that bound his body denied him even that. He gasped and sputtered, trying to let his voice out, to call back â€" call for help, but only a noiseless wheeze escaped him. Tears streamed down his cheeks, burning like acid, sloughing his skin off.

'_Frankenstein_.' The voice beckoned to him again, a lot more urgent this time and yet Frankenstein couldn't answer him.

Those fingers were under his flesh now. The air was putrid with the stench of his own fear. There was no escape. It had all been an illusion. He was going die here, in the darkness, all alone, strangled by something that couldn't even be perceived. This was his fate, had always been and no matter how hard he tried to escape, he knew he wouldn't be able to. Resigned, Frankenstein closed his eyes and stopped struggling, turning away from the only thing that might have been his salvation.

Then, as if apocalypse itself had come, the darkness was lifted from his sight. The very space around him was rent into nothingness until little remained except brilliance of something brighter than the sun. It burnt his retinas and drowned every sensory input, it purged the poison from his veins and he was nothing, wrapped in light and cocooned in a familiar warmth.

When he was able to open his eyes again, he felt just a little cold.

It was dark again â€" except his vision was dotted with a billion twinkling lights â€" so familiar. It was the night sky. The moon hung heavy on the horizon and illuminated the bare treetops. The entire world was bathed in its milky glow and Frankenstein himself wasn't an exception.

He was suspended in air, a long way from the ground.

His cognitive functions returned to him the moment he saw where he was. He flailed and panicked, but nothing happened. He was floating in the air, and while he had the liberty to move his arms and legs, gravity couldn't touch him. He felt so overwrought that all he could manage was a weary chuckle as he gave up trying to understand just what the hell was going on. Maybe the dream was still continuing. Maybe he would never escape this nightmare.

Then he heard it. A faint rustle and breeze stirring from behind him. He craned his neck and found himself looking at a giant pair of wings. They spanned at least twenty feet across and eclipsed almost everything from view, but now he could tell where he was.

"Raizel?" He croaked, blinking in surprise. He hadn't known he could still be surprised tonight, and yet.

The child â€" Raizel â€" acknowledged him with another beat of his enormous wings and lifted his hand. The air around him gave way, and an invisible force gently lowered him to the ground. His knees buckled once he hit the ground; however, the power that supported him kept on cradling him until he could stand without assistance.

And once he could, the wings curled into themselves and Frankenstein finally saw it. Those wings had a chiaroscuro pattern â€" it was just hard to see it in moonlight. They were white with angry splotches of black spreading from the tips and reaching inward. It had to mean something, but he couldn't quite work out what. And he wasn't allowed more thoughts on that matter as Raizel's figure wobbled in midair, the wings disappeared and he fell.

Frankenstein didn't need all of his faculties to reach out and grab him before he crashed to the ground. His body had moved before his brain could process. There was no impact when Raizel tumbled into his arms, however. It was as if he weighed nothing at all. As if he wasn't real.

He couldn't abide by that thought. He gathered Raizel's infinitely precious and fragile body in his arms and carried him inside their shared home. He couldn't make neither head nor tails of what had happened to him â€" to them, but it could wait. It could wait until he knew that Raizel was okay, because even so heavily disoriented, he could tell that he'd been saved by Raizel. Saved and protected â€" at a great cost to him. Just for Frankenstein's sake.

And Frankenstein couldn't live with himself if someone as precious as Raizel was hurt because of Frankenstein. He'd rather die first.

5. Chapter 5

The coachman and the chauffeur were waiting for him in the foyer when he stepped inside. Frankenstein's hands tightened over Raizel's body instinctively. Were they here to punish him for hurting Raizel? Or were they here to separate them since he had caused Raizel so much trouble? Maybe it was better that way. Even if the idea of separating from Raizel made his heart twinge.

"Relax," the coachman said, holding up his hand and moved a little closer. "May I see him?"

Frankenstein didn't want to relent his grip. His body was still in fight or flight mode, and he had never been able to trust these two as much. If he had been less upset, he might have pondered why they had managed to appear inside the house. But it had been a tiring night, so Frankenstein let it pass, focusing on other more important things.

"I won't hurt him. There is no way I can." There was enough sincerity in those words that Frankenstein loosened his death grip and passed Raizel's body over.

The two of them studied Raizel for a moment, before sharing a look. The coachman pursed his lips and the lines on the chauffeur's face deepened. They stood in silence for a few more moments, before the coachman turned to him and took off his hat. Long and sleek blond hair fell free of its confines and the image of the coachman's face distorted for a second, before reforming into something far more pleasing to the eye. The beard was gone too.

Frankenstein had expected a disguise from the get-go â€" he just hadn't counted on it being, well, magical.

"I'm sure you have a lot of questions, but I regret to inform you that I cannot answer them. However, if you wish I can take you to the one who can give you more information. Unless you'd rather rest a bit first?"

"I don't think I can rest tonight," Frankenstein replied, swallowing a ball of panic at the idea of sleeping again.

"Very well," the coachman said and handed Raizel over to the other man. "Do not worry â€" he will not be harmed." When he noticed that Frankenstein was still staring at Raizel's form, he added, "I know I cannot ask you to trust me, but you're in bit of a shock right now. It would be for the best if we go where someone can explain things to you."

Frankenstein had to admit that he was suffering from shock. His nightmares were often violent and left him with injuries â€" self-inflicted, most of the times. And each time he felt like a wreck for hours afterwards, and the truly bad ones lasting for days. It was one of the reasons he could never be free from the clutches of the Organisation. They didn't have to find him physically to torment him.

"Okay," Frankenstein acquiesced grudgingly and ran a hand through his tangled hair.

"Then let's go," the coachman said, stepping forward again until they were standing face to face.

It was a really beautiful face. If this man was also something like Raizel, was beauty a shared trait across the species then?

"Right now?"

"Yes, please take my hand." The coachman struck out his hand and waited until Frankenstein placed his into it. Frankenstein was too tired to argue, or even be surprised when the world around him turned blurry and far too bright. Frankenstein raised his free hand to his face and closed his eyes, and when he opened them again, he was standing in a familiar office in front of a familiar man.

"Ah, Mr. Lee, it has been around two months, hasn't it?" He said as a way of greeting, his mouth stretched into a thin smile. There was nothing lighthearted about that expression now.

Ah. Frankenstein realised with a start. The gloves had finally come off — it had just taken endangering the life of a completely innocent being to bring him to this point. He felt numb all over, being beyond shock at this point. He snatched his hand away from his guide's grip and stalked forward, anger simmering just below the surface.

He wanted to pummel him so bad, and he would have had too, if the coachman hadn't grabbed his arm hard enough to bruise. It did nothing to quell Frankenstein's anger, however, and he lashed out, elbowing the stupidly pretty guy in the ribs. The coachman grunted, but did not let go.

"Enough," Mr. Emsworth said, and his voice was so commanding that Frankenstein stood down without really wanting to. "I understand that you're upset, but fighting would only delay the explanations I need to give you. Take a seat, Mr. Lee. Have some tea with me, for once?"

There was tea set out on that table today instead of whiskey, and the sight of it made nostalgia hit him in the chest like a freight train. He took half a step back, before grinding his teeth and complying with Emsworth's request. "Your explanation," he said, seating himself opposite the man. "It had better be good."

"Oh, it is," the man drawled and poured him some tea.

Frankenstein sipped at his cup, feeling none of the warmth that Raizel's presence provided him in abundance. He set the cup down and hunched a little, covering his face with his hands. The shock was starting to fade and he could feel himself trembling. The adrenaline in his system was receding and he knew it wasn't going to be pretty once it was all gone. He clenched his teeth and stared at Emsworth, wanting to crack open his skull with sheer will alone.

Emsworth gave him a small smile and put his cup down, folding his hands in his lap and regarding Frankenstein seriously. "So, ask me whatever you'd like?"

"Everything. I want to know everything."

"Too broad."

The urge to sock him in the face only grew.

"Well, what's wrong with Raizel. What happened to him? What is he?"

"He's sort of fading away. I don't know what happened to him. And I can't tell you what he is."

So much for someone _explaining things_.

Frankenstein banked all his patience and grit his teeth. He needed answers, and this was apparently the only source he had. "What _can_ you tell me then?"

Emsworth lowered his gaze in contemplation before looking at Frankenstein again, unnerving him slightly at the way he seemed to _see_ through him. "Not much, I'm afraid. You are correct in assuming a few things, however, and I will confirm them for you. It's true you had a nightmare tonight. You walked out of the window in your sleep and Raizel saved you. Raizel isn't supposed to use his powers so extensively â€" not that holding you above ground used much strength. But he had to go into the depths of your nightmare and stop it. Otherwise," Emsworth's expression fell a little. "You'd have lost more memories, isn't that right?"

Frankenstein blanched. "You _know_ about that?" Who _were_ these people?

"Do not worry," the man hastened to explain. "I have not violated your privacy by looking into your mind. It's just really apparent. All that neurodegeneration, as you people call it, I can see it. You would be too young to have it, except it's caused by some kind of poison, isn't it?"

"Yes," Frankenstein replied, gripping the handrests hard enough to make his fingers numb. He didn't want to talk about it. He really didn't, but â€" "You said he stopped it?"

Emsworth nodded. "At a great cost to himself, but yes," he sighed and leaned back a little. "Not that it's your fault, of course. Please don't think I'm blaming you. He's always like this. Besides, it is not that he was able to reverse the damage that has already been done, nor can he stop what is ultimately your fate."

"Yes, I know. I'll lose all my memories," Frankenstein said, trying to detach himself completely from the situation â€" and failing. "By that time the brain damage would be so severe that I'll also end up dying not long after. Not much I can do about it."

The man in front of him looked pained. He had to have seen it, if he could guess at neurodegeneration just by looking at Frankenstein, and yet being told about it made him look wretched.

"It's not just the poison they fed you for years," Emsworth spoke after he was done schooling his features into something less rueful. "It was â€" some of our kind who constantly worked on you and then removed your memories forcibly. That is the reason you have been losing all your early memories."

"Oh," Frankenstein says, sitting so still that he could have been mistaken for a statue. What Emsworth said seemed to make sense on some level, but Frankenstein's brain refused to process it. Up until now he believed that the drugs they used to force people to work for them was the reason he was suffering from memory loss. It was awful, but as a young teen who had been taken into the Organisation, he had made the choice to take it. He didn't know what it would do to him, but he had ingested it with his own hands. He was a child and didn't know any better, he had followed his friend's lead and done it. So what if his friend had sold him into the Organisation? It was a moot point by now and he didn't hate him.

But this â€

"Explain," he forced that one word out of his mouth and tried not to throw up.

"As you can no doubt tell, we're not human. What we are isn't really important to the discussion, so I'll skip it." He caught Frankenstein's disapproving look and gave him a disarming smile â€ not that it worked. "A bunch of us wanted out of the rigid system we are a part of â€ were, really, so they took out Raizel by tricking him somehow. I don't exactly know what happened myself, Raizel doesn't tell me these things." The man sighed in annoyance and rolled his eyes. "This and that happened â€ " Frankenstein stared at him incredulously. How was he supposed to take any of this seriously? This and that? But the man continued: "They left our, um, organisation, and came here in the human world to do things."

What kind of things, Frankenstein wanted to ask, but he supposed he had a good idea already.

"I couldn't punish them â€ by the way, I was their Lord back then," Emsworth beamed at him. "Because they hadn't broken the taboo and used their special powers. Some residual powers are permitted to people like us, but not the kind Raizel used on you. They circumvented the rules by putting you under the influence of a potent poison and then manipulated your memories however they wanted. It requires little force, after all."

"Are you saying you can't do anything about him until they use their real powers?"

"Yes, and I cannot do anything about them now anyway, as I have resigned and relinquished my powers as well. If I were to use them now, I, too, would suffer like Raizel."

Frankenstein ignored the pang in his heart at the idea of Raizel suffering and tried to focus on how much didn't make sense. "But when these deserters or whatever use their powers, real ones, I mean, won't they suffer too?"

"They would," Emsworth confirmed. "But they have held out until now, so it won't be so bad. Not like Raizel who was forced to use a lot of powers several hundred years ago. That guy has been fading away for centuries..."

Emsworth trailed off, not elaborating further and Frankenstein covered his face with trembling hands. In all of this, the thing that

resonated with most clarity inside his head was that both he and Raizel were in a really similar situation, unfortunately so.

"Is there a way to help him?" Frankenstein asked when it seemed like there would be nothing more forthcoming.

Emsworth regarded him with renewed interest. "You wish to save Raizel but not yourself?"

Frankenstein gave a mirthless laugh. "I have already peace with my fate, but that's not the same for Raizel. No one has ever taken such great pains to help me, so it's only natural that I want to save him."

"I am not sure if there is a way you can help him," Emsworth began, steepling his fingers and leaning towards Frankenstein for the first time. "But I have a feeling that if it's you, something will turn up, sooner or later."

His head hurt and he was still trying to recover from the crash his system went into after the chemicals having run riot in his veins from last few hours. All this new information hadn't made anything better, despite his expectations to the contrary. He was left with far more questions than before.

"However," Emsworth said, breaking into his thoughts with his soft voice. "Even if you can't save him, just staying by his side will help. It already has."

"You don't have to tell me about that. I wasn't planning to leave his side even if you told me to," Frankenstein bristled and took a few deep breaths. He needed time to sort all this information out and form theories of his own. He couldn't do it right now. Not when he was so mentally wrung out. "Say, is Emsworth really your name?"

"No." His lips quirked in an amused smile. "It's supposed to be Lord Emsworth, because I used to be a Lord and I liked this character in these human stories I had had the pleasure of reading a while back. You can call me Lord though, because that's my rightful title, even if I'm no longer one. However," he mused as a fond look flitted across his face. "It will be confusing if you ever get to meet the current Lord. Who, by the way, is the most amazing Lord of all times! She's not only very intelligent, she's also very powerful and adorable!"

The coachman cleared his throat and Emsworth " the Lord seemed to remember where he was.

"This is Ragar," he pointed at the coachman. "Don't blame him for not giving you his name until now. Ever since we retired, we lost our real names and had to take new ones for ourselves. It's one of the few liberties allowed to us and a lot of us do it even though they aren't yet down here yet. Like Gejutel, the guy you left back at Raizel's place."

"So he didn't retire along with you guys?" Frankenstein asked, fishing for information.

"No, I asked him to stay behind to guide the new generation. My

daughter is still young and inexperienced â€" I mean, the current Lord. She has great potential and she will be do just fine, but as her father, I can't help worrying. You have any idea how difficult it is to be a father? Especially in our line of work?"

The man went on and on further about his duties as a father, and after a while, Frankenstein tuned him out. He sounded like one of those besotted parents and Frankenstein's mental state wasn't up to dealing with one of those. He finished his tea and tried to wrap his head around all that he had been told, which now when he thought back to, wasn't that much. He had suspected half of it himself, and there really was a reason he was so comfortable with someone reading his mind. Even if his mind had forgotten, his body remembered. If he had lived with these beings for a long time in the Organisation, it was no wonder he took so easily to Raizel, though he was loathe to compare the two.

"Lord," the coachman â€" Ragar spoke up suddenly. "It seems that Sir Raizel is awake and is concerned about this man's well-being."

"Ah," the Lord paused mid-tirade and looked at Frankenstein as if he had forgotten he had an audience. "Yes, yes, you should head back and see to him."

"All right," Frankenstein said and stood up, wobbling only for a second. Ragar stepped forward and took his arm, though Frankenstein knew it was for teleportation â€" and this was the kind of world he was living in, now â€" purposes. "Thank you, I suppose." Then a thought occurred to him and he turned to face the Lord again. "Does this mean that Raizel was always able to see what was wrong with me?"

"Yes, and it caused him a great amount of pain to see you suffer so much," the Lord replied, tone solemn again. "But out of consideration for you, he didn't want to remind you of unpleasant things."

Frankenstein tightened his grip on Ragar's hand and turned away. This wasn't the kind of information he could deal with right now. Not when he couldn't even see Raizel and make sure if he was okay. He wanted to go back â€" go home to Raizel. How strange that he had come to think of a haunted castle as home when he hadn't had one ever since he turned fourteen.

The Lord stood up and placed his hand upon Frankenstein's shoulder, squeezing it ever so gently. "I would say sorry for all manner of things, but they wouldn't even bring you empty comfort, so all I will say to you is that Raizel is probably the only one who can help you, and vice versa. Please take care."

Frankenstein didn't answer him. He turned to Ragar and nodded and they were pulled through time and space, and before a moment had passed, Frankenstein found himself in Raizel's room, surrounded by the warmth and familiarity of the place. He was able to relax slightly and let go of Ragar. Ragar and the chauffeur, Gejutel as he was called, both excused themselves right away and Frankenstein barely even acknowledged them.

His eyes sought Raizel's small figure, trying to reassure himself that he was all right, physically at least. However, what was

waiting him at home was something completely different. When he finally found Raizel, who had seated on one of the chairs that adorned the room, he discovered that Raizel was no longer a child.

It was the same face; it had lost the edge of innocence a child's features provided and had instead taken on a shimmering sort of beauty, so exquisite and yet so delicate. The eyes that gazed at him, full of concern, however, were still the same. He had found Ragar to be rather beautiful, but what was in front of him now surpassed understanding.

However, it also made him slightly uncomfortable. He certainly hadn't expected that, and he blamed it on the upheavals of the night he'd had, but this wasn't something that escaped Raizel's notice. Immediately Raizel turned his face away and closed his eyes, his entire figure flinching away from Frankenstein.

"Ah," Frankenstein said, stepping forward almost instinctively to soothe whatever what pain he had caused Raizel. He had always known that Raizel wasn't actually a child, of course, but the small form had always elicited some kind of protective instinct in him. The same instincts were overwhelming him now, because even though Raizel was the size of a full-grown man, he seemed smaller, inordinately fragile. "Are you all right?" He asked, walking to the chair and then going on his knees so he could be face to face with Raizel.

He turned to face Frankenstein and nodded. There was still something so tentative about his gesture that it broke Frankenstein's heart. There had to be a reason as to why he looked like this, but Frankenstein couldn't bring himself to care. Not now.

"Thank you for saving me," Frankenstein murmured and took Raizel's hand in his. He had to remember that this was no longer a child, and yet.

"You don't have to thank me," Raizel replied, slowly curling his fingers around Frankenstein's palm and grasping it back.

The gesture warmed Frankenstein's heart and all the exhaustion seemed to melt away from his body. Impulsively, he reached out and gathered Raizel's body in his arms, though he remembered to keep his hold loose enough that Raizel could break away at any moment.

"No, thank you. I'm sorry that it hurt you," Frankenstein said and pressed Raizel against him. This would have been so much easier had Raizel still been a child. "I hope this doesn't bother you."

Raizel shook his head and seemed to lean into him, so Frankenstein pulled Raizel closer and stayed that way for several minutes. When Frankenstein did let go, it was Raizel who seemed reluctant to part. It brought a smile to Frankenstein's face. He took a seat next to him and closed his eyes, simply enjoying Raizel's presence next to him, now that he was aware of it on a different level than before. His life had barely made much sense before he came here, and he was far too tired to think what it all meant. He was tired enough to not bother with it for days, but he knew that wasn't about to happen. His brain was going in overdrive even as he began to relax. He shook his head and stopped himself from dwelling. It helped to focus on Raizel, unsurprisingly.

Raizel was so comforting, safe and warm that Frankenstein couldn't help it. The noise in his mind quieted and he sat there with Raizel, watching the sun come up. A new day had begun and there were so many things he still wanted to let Raizel taste and experience. It was a fine day and it would be such a shame to waste it by dwelling on the past. He stretched a little and turned to look at Raizel whose entire attention had been captured by the rosy hue of the sky outside.

"Would you like some tea?"

"Yes."

It was a little slice of normalcy that Frankenstein had carved out for himself in the wild ride that was his life, and he wouldn't change it for anyone.

6. Chapter 6

Frankenstein blinked groggily, stretching a little in the warm patch he was currently resting and opened his eyes to a familiar sight. As he hadn't returned to his room yesterday, he was still in Raizel's bedroom "sleeping next to him" and Raizel was still there, now having shrunk down to his old size. Frankenstein felt a pang of disappointment as well as a surge of relief. The former he felt from returning to normal state of affairs, but he was not sure about the cause of the latter.

"Are you all right?" He asked, trying to observe Raizel without being obtrusive.

Raizel gave a slow nod and went to stand at the window. Frankenstein watched him for a few minutes, waffling over whether it was all right to ask him questions or should he keep trying milk the Lord for answers?

"Frankenstein," Raizel said without turning around and Frankenstein realised his mistake. Of course, he would notice. "There is no reason for you to stay here. You are free to leave. I can call Ragar to pick you up and lead you back to the human world."

Whatever Frankenstein had been expected, this wasn't it.

"What? Why?" He knew he sounded a little shocked but he couldn't help it. Why would Raizel want to send him away now?

"You didn't come here as a prisoner but you are still treated as one," Raizel said quietly, not letting Frankenstein see his face. "The Lord and the others mean well, but being here with me is not good for you. I " I didn't know what was done to you, for I never wanted to look deep into your heart. I could see what was on the surface and that was painful enough. Now that I know," Raizel paused, his voice a little tremulous as if he could not conceive the idea of someone being so cruel. "As for someone like me " I'm the same as them. The people who have hurt you so terribly."

"How are you the same?" Frankenstein asked, clenching his fists and getting up from the couch. He strode up to Raizel and grabbed his

shoulder, pulling him back though he made sure not to be rough. "Did you try to wipe my memory as well?"

Raizel looked up at him, finally, and Frankenstein blanched at the look on his face. "I did not, but I went deep into your mind. I looked at things I was not allowed to see."

"The Lord said you did it to make sure I didn't lose more memories." Raizel nodded a little but his expression still remained heartbreaking. Frankenstein took a deep breath and loosened his hold. "That wasn't a permanent fix though, was it?"

"No."

"Well, what counts is that you tried. Though, please don't next time, if it hurts you so much."

"Even so â€" "

"It's enough that you are sorry for violating my privacy. The others that you liken yourself to didn't even care about what I wanted." How could Raizel compare himself to them, Frankenstein couldn't fathom, but he knew that they were nothing alike.

Raizel glanced outside the window for a moment, and then back at Frankenstein with a troubled face still. "The beings who did this to you, it was my job to stop them. And yet I have failed in doing so, and as such, failed you and countless others."

"Nobody's perfect. You can't shoulder the blame of the entire world like that. Haven't they hurt you as well? The reason why you're stuck here, in this form?" He again wondered why Raizel was in this form again, but didn't know if he should ask just yet.

"I am fine," Raizel insisted and blinked. "You want to ask me something. What is it?"

"Can you tell?" Frankenstein asked sheepishly.

"Only that there is a question in your mind. I have been trying very hard not to probe at your mind, also because I'm afraid it may damage you further."

"Ah," Frankenstein sighed. "Well, yes. I was wondering about the sudden appearance change you went through earlier. You don't have to tell me though, if you don't feel comfortable."

Raizel's eyes took a faraway look, the light fading from them as they seemed to see something in the distant past and not Frankenstein. "Some things happened in the past â€" of which you may come to know just yet, and I was injured, terribly so. I put myself into stasis and took as small a form as I could maintain easily. However, when I use my powers which I shouldn't, I revert to looking like a human."

"So it hurts less if you're a little kid?" Frankenstein ventured.

"In a manner of speaking."

"Why can't you use your powers?" Frankenstein asked, because that question had been bothering him for a long while already. The Lord had mentioned that he had given up his powers too, and using them now would inflict pain on him the way it did for Raizel. He had also said the ones who betrayed them also couldn't, for the very same reason. Maybe it was a weakness he could exploit?

"Because I have lost the mandate," Raizel said, more to himself than Frankenstein and then fell silent, either unwilling or unable to explain more. Frankenstein could tell.

How could he tell?

"Hey," he said, frowning a little. "I might be wrong, but I'm able to sense how you feel. It's not just my imagination, is it?"

"You can look into my heart to some extent," Raizel said. "Just like I can."

"Seriously?"

Raizel walked away from the window and went to sit down on the chair again, Frankenstein trailing him in a daze. There was a pinched look on Raizel's face and as much as it bothered Frankenstein, a part of him was clamouring to know exactly how he had become _psychic_.

"Prolonged exposure to people like me, and constant attacks on your brain," Raizel said, a little bitterly and clasped his hands in his lap, staring intently at him. "Forgive me."

"No, but that's _great_. Now I can identify the people who want to harm me and save myself!" Frankenstein exclaimed. He wasn't that disturbed by it, when it had already happened â€" no use crying over spilt milk. Especially not when he could turn it to his advantage.

Raizel only gave him an unhappy look. Perhaps to him, it was a terrible thing to be privy to another's thoughts â€" and well, Frankenstein could understand why. He technically didn't want to tap into Raizel's emotions, for they were personal. And Frankenstein was fond of Raizel, quite a lot.

"Anyway," Frankenstein said, leaning on the window sill and letting the cold wind tousle his hair. It was cold, but not unpleasantly so. "If it's all the same to you, I would rather stay here with you, unlessâ€"|" He trailed off, a sudden idea striking him and bringing a grin to his face.

Raizel looked at him questioningly.

"Can you summon Ragar? I want to see that old man again."

Raizel sighed, but did as was asked of him.

* * *

><p>"Well?" asked a gorgeous blond sitting in the Lord's chair, sporting a slightly put-out expression.<p>

"Who are you?" Frankenstein asked, unsure if Ragar hadn't just brought him to the wrong person out of annoyance.

"Oh, Frankenstein," the blond said with a sly smile, and it was so familiar that Frankenstein identified him even before it was explained. "This is my true appearance. Sorry for all that earlier, but we are friends now, right?"

"No," Frankenstein said flatly. "And I hadn't yet given you my name."

"Oops?" The Lord offered with a small grin and Frankenstein scowled at him.

"It's fine. At this point asking anyone to respect my privacy is foolish, isn't it?" Frankenstein crossed his arms and shook his head. He was so tired of these people and he barely even knew them. Except Raizel. Raizel was all right.

"Forgive me," the Lord said, his tone a lot more sincere this time. He looked appropriately remorseful and pursed his lips. "I wasn't expecting to see you here so quickly."

"Well, I had a question. A request, really," Frankenstein began, and then added, "It's for Raizel's sake."

The Lord gave him an incredulous look.

"He feels as if he's holding me prisoner or something, so I was wondering if I could bring him here. To live in the human world, if there's no issue with that. Is there?"

The Lord stared at him. Ragar, too, was staring at him. Frankenstein tried not to feel bothered by it, but he could feel their surprise roll off of them in waves and it worried him.

"Well?" He prompted a tad impatiently and tried not to buckle under the tension.

The Lord was the first one to collect himself and schooled his face into a look of careful blankness. "Raizel is the one who has confined himself to that prison-like castle. If he consents to coming out here and living with you, I have absolutely no objections to that."

Frankenstein chewed on this for a few moments and then nodded with understanding. "All right, I'll ask him." He turned to Ragar and took his hand. "Time to go back, I guess. But, ah," he turned to look at the Lord one last time and tried not to sound too smug. "I can tell what you're feeling, you know, so no point in trying to hide it." He hoped for at least one small victory over the Lord who seemed to always have the upper hand.

However, the Lord merely gave him a kind smile, dashing Frankenstein's plans to get one over him. He knew there was a reason he didn't like this man.

"You take too many liberties with the Lord," Ragar said to him once they were back in Raizel's castle, his tone mildly reproachful.

Frankenstein shrugged. Ragar did not push the matter further. Instead, he brought out his hat and tugged it over his face to hide it again.

"Just ask Sir Raizel to call me if you are able to convince him to leave this place. He has always been so lonely," Ragar said, looking at the castle a little sadly. "Even when he wasn't stuck here." He disappeared right after he said this, not giving Frankenstein a chance to reply. Not that Frankenstein minded, however. Ragar's impression had improved steadily in Frankenstein's eyes over the past few days, and this just made it more concrete.

Frankenstein pulled his coat closer together to his body to adjust to the colder temperature of the castle and marched towards the kitchen. It was time to make tea.

* * *

><p>It turned out that it was rather easy to convince Raizel to leave his castle when Frankenstein proposed it. His face seemed to light up immediately, and then fell right away as he thought of the implications. Frankenstein managed to convince him nonetheless that not everyone was suffering from psychic probing, and as such wasn't going to be affected by Raizel's powers.<p>

Ragar and Gejutel came over to help them pack up and leave through the same carriage that had brought Frankenstein here. Gejutel assisted Raizel, while Ragar ventured into Frankenstein's room and raised an inquisitive eyebrow at the volume of journals he had collected. Frankenstein gave him a look.

"Did you forget how many I had asked for?"

"No," Ragar conceded and helped Frankenstein put them into cardboard boxes. "I'm just surprised you filled them all. I thought you were burning them or something."

"What a silly idea," Frankenstein scoffed. "I record every single day in them, all the details I deem necessary. I also try to write down the things I remember from the past and I study what I have written before. It's all in my cipher, of course."

A look of comprehension crossed Ragar's face and he made no further comment. Frankenstein knew he liked Ragar for a good reason, after all.

"The Lord has arranged for you to live in a house in Princetown itself for now," Ragar said instead, taping the box shut and setting it out in a pile. "It's probably safe from the men pursuing you, or so we feel. If you want to take Sir Raizel around the world later sometime, that can also be arranged."

"Thanks, that's really a great help," Frankenstein said, genuinely surprised. He knew the Lord wasn't doing it for him, but still, it was nice to be taken care of and protected for once.

And so they moved into an old but well-kept house in the small town of Princetown, not that far from the hotel he'd stayed in before. He

wondered if he could go pay a visit to the hotel staff sometime, but thought better of it. He might run into them sooner or later, so it was pointless to go out of his way. Besides, he had someone very important to focus on right now.

Raizel, for his part, took everything very calmly, remarkably so for a being that had been stuck in a medieval castle for centuries. He looked around, certainly, and seemed to absorb everything in his vision with a great deal of interest, but there wasn't any hint of surprise from him. Frankenstein couldn't feel it, at least, just a faint sense of wonder and happiness.

The latter warmed him to the core: the idea that he was able to give Raizel a modicum of happiness. No child, actual or magical, should be deprived of good things.

So Frankenstein went all out, splurging his salary â€" the Lord had actually paid him for the work done â€" on buying modern appliances for the sake of himself and Raizel both, a television for Raizel to watch, the latest cell phone for Raizel to play with and an assortment of books that he thought he might like. Ragar had assured him that food and other expenses would be managed by them, so he wasn't worried about saving anything. What would he do with long-term saving anyway?

He showed them all to Raizel, explaining what each of them while Raizel sat down on a comfortable (and new) couch, examining all of them with interest. He was rather inept with most of them, but he took rather quickly to the phone and the television. Frankenstein left him to it and proceeded to finally take a bath that didn't involve chopping logs, lighting fires and tending to them, lugging hot water around and making him more sweaty and grimy than ever. He turned on the central heating and curled up comfortably on his clean bed.

Raizel was happy, Frankenstein was clean and happy, and that was all that mattered.

Winter turned into spring, the snow slowly melting and giving way to new life as more than half a year passed in Raizel's company. Frankenstein spent most of his days making sure Raizel was well-fed, taking him out in the town â€" mostly at night when the streets were deserted, though Raizel loved to go to the market during daytime to purchase groceries with Frankenstein. The locals cooed at him in the beginning, startling him, but he had gotten used to it gradually and bore it with remarkable dignity. Frankenstein just gave them tolerant smiles and moved on. He did run into the hotel staff and explained that he had been assigned to take care of his employer's nephew instead of guarding his haunted castle. Whether or not they believed him wasn't important to him.

The rest of the time Frankenstein took to his journals. He didn't want to write it on a laptop because that could be hacked, if he used internet â€" which he did â€" but coded journals were as good as he was going to get. He had learned to shield his mind a little better ever since gaining psychic sense, so he was sure that even if someone stole them and attacked his mind for the sake of decrypting them, he could guard it with a measure of success. It was an acceptable risk because while it didn't stop his memory from deteriorating, it certainly slowed down the process.

It was all he could do, anyway, to lead a normal life. It might not have been the life he had wanted, but it was far better than the one he had fled from, and it was all thanks to Raizel that he was able to find a refuge.

* * *

><p>Frankenstein put a bottle of juice into his shopping cart, glancing at the small figure following him with a serene look on his face. Three months he had lived in the human world, and yet his wonder at the sight of supermarkets hadn't faded. Frankenstein smiled at Raizel indulgently and pointed at the piece of paper clutched between tiny, elegant fingers.<p>

"Tofu," Raizel read out. "You said we would eat some Mapo doufu tonight."

"Indeed," Frankenstein said pleasantly and wheeled his cart towards the required item. Raizel walked after him like a good child, though he had a disturbing propensity of getting lost if Frankenstein let him out of his sight too long. Frankenstein attributed his inability to find the correct directions from having never stepped outside the castle for a long time, and certainly never navigating like a human would. That Raizel tried so hard was adorable in itself and Frankenstein didn't mind looking for him when he did lose his way. He could unerringly find Raizel because of he could feel Raizel no matter where he was.

It was certainly convenient.

"Anything else?" Frankenstein asked, adding a few packets of tofu to his growing list of purchases. Raizel shook his head, so Frankenstein started towards the checkout counter instead.

The cashier greeted him with a friendly smile and then bent down to sneak Raizel a piece of candy. Frankenstein bore it with a yet another patient smile and handed his items for her to ring out.

"Ah, Mr. Lee," she exclaimed suddenly when she saw the tofu. "Did you know?"

"Yes?" He asked perfunctorily. The locals really loved their gossip and while Frankenstein didn't begrudge them, he would rather be on his way. Though, he knew it was good to be abreast of anything new or suspicious going in the town in case the Organisation was making its moves.

"A bunch of Asian kids were kidnapped from the tour to the prison museum," the girl whispered in a hushed tone. "One moment they were there, the next: poof! Gone! Why would anyone commit a kidnapping at the prison?"

"I am not sure," Frankenstein said, frowning. Any news about crime was potentially a sign of movement from the Organisation. He hoped he would be able to overlook this, however. He hoped it was nothing but a misunderstanding.

"Lady," a gruff voice spoke from behind him, jolting him out of his thoughts. "I just wanna buy this milk, so could you move along a bit

faster?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry, sir," the cashier apologised and started sorting through Frankenstein's purchases a little faster.

Frankenstein glanced over his shoulder, interested despite himself since the voice had a foreign accent that he couldn't place. However, the moment he did so, his blood froze in his veins.

"M-24?" He said, almost too loud and the attention of the big man snapped to him _so fast_ that he must have gotten a whiplash.

"Dr. F?" M-24 exclaimed, shocked.

A litany of '_fuck, fuck, fuck_' ran through Frankenstein's suddenly overwrought mind. How typical that his luck would give out when he'd least expected it to. And of all the people, it had to be _Crombel's_ underling that found him, lowering the curtain on the peaceful life he had worked so hard to build.

7. Chapter 7

The cashier gave them a strange look and Frankenstein turned to give her a reassuring smile, though his heart was pounding hard in his chest. "Ah, fancy meeting you here!" He exclaimed with fake cheer directed towards M-24. "Let's go and catch up outside."

The cashier gave him a dubious look, not failing to observe how the both of them had paled considerably. She opened her mouth to say something, but Raizel beat her to it.

"I want another candy," he said, sliding his hand into Frankenstein's and gripping it tightly. M-24 looked down at him and his eyes widened a little in confusion.

"O-okay." She said and slipped Raizel another candy and rung up Frankenstein's purchases. Frankenstein grabbed the bag and pulled Raizel out of the supermarket, giving M-24 a meaningful look. Frankenstein stepped outside and went to a secluded spot in the parking lot from where he could see the doors perfectly well. M-24 ambled out not long after, his solitary purchase cradled close to his chest and he donned his hat as soon as he spotted Frankenstein.

Raizel tugged on his hand and Frankenstein gave him an imploring look, asking him silently to get behind him. M-24 had seen him already so there was no hiding him, but Frankenstein could try.

"Dr. F," M-24 greeted nervously and looked between the pair of them with a gaze that betrayed interest. "It's been a long time."

"Five years, give or take," Frankenstein said airily, clutching at Raizel's fingers out of sight.

"Never thought I'd run into you here. We thought you had gotten away for good, if you weren't dead already, that is." There was a shifty look on his face and Frankenstein's eyes narrowed at that.

"You kidnapped those kids?" He got straight to the point, ignoring

M-24's attempts to stall for time before any backup arrived, which Frankenstein was sure was on its way. "Don't think I don't know."

M-24 gave him a sheepish look and backed a little, raising his hands to pacify Frankenstein's anger. "Does it matter that we did? Besides, _why_ are you here? Roaming around in public?"

"I have my reasons," Frankenstein replied, before grabbing the lapels of M-24's coat and dragging him down forcefully. "How many of you are here? Tell me or I might be forced to break your neck."

M-24 was a big guy, fairly strong physically, but Frankenstein was _stronger_. M-24 knew it too because he made no moves to shake Frankenstein off. "Just me and M-21," he said quickly.

Frankenstein let him go, not all that mollified, but it would have to do under the circumstances. "Just you two? What about the rest of your comrades?"

M-24's expression closed off. "Dead," he said in a vacant voice and pulled at his coat in a distracted manner.

"Oh."

It wasn't something Frankenstein hadn't foreseen, but it still came as a surprise. Frankenstein could commiserate with that, though he did not know what to offer as comfort. What could his words mean to someone like these people who were even worse off than he was?

"M-21 will be here soon. I haven't told him what happened, soâ€¦" M-24 said then, scuffing his shoes on the pavement and looking for all intents and purposes like an awkward child.

"Let those kids go, M-24," Frankenstein implored instead, ignoring the way out even though it had been given to him, because he knew what kind of people these two were.

"We're not all as lucky as you were, Dr. F," M-24 said quietly. "You were able to make a clean break, but we can't. _I _can't. You were always kind to us back then, so just this time I'll let you go. Please," his face twisted in remorse. "Don't force me."

"Do you really think you are letting me go?" Frankenstein asked, shifting the shopping bag from his right hand to the left and letting go of Raizel's hand. He could feel Raizel's discomfort and wanted nothing but to take him to a safe place, away from the drama from his past life. It couldn't be helped right now, however.

"I know I can't take you on alone, but if M-21 comes here, even you'd have a hard time fighting off the both of us."

"Really now?" Frankenstein pushed his fingers into his hair, pushing it away from his face as he regarded M-24 with a smirk. To think these guys were not taking him seriously. It had been a while since he'd fought someone, but he was raring to go, blood singing in his veins from long-forgotten excitement. He would have too, if not for a small hand coming to rest on his arm, stopping him in his tracks.

Frankenstein started, sighed and shook his head, pulling away from the confrontational stance.

"Right," he cleared his throat and took Raizel's hand in his again. "M-24, the kids â€"

"M-24?" Another voice joined his and they all turned to look at the new arrival. Frankenstein had now lost his window of opportunity to escape unscathed because between the two of them, M-24 was kinder, more prone to being generous than M-21. Not to say that M-21 wasn't a good guy â€" they both were, but M-21 was extremely protective of his comrades and would do anything for them. Go to any lengths. It helped that he was the strongest among them, and as such he had taken on the role of saving them. Between M-24's safety and Frankenstein's, he would definitely choose M-24 â€" and Frankenstein didn't resent that. But.

He would never let the kids go.

"Dr. F?" M-21 exclaimed, just as taken aback at M-24 was and Frankenstein suppressed a sigh.

"Right, we're going to attract too much attention standing here in such a suspicious way. Let's go to that cafÃ©." He pointed to a nearby one and looked at Raizel for confirmation. Raizel, for his part, looked a little perturbed but he made no moves to dissuade Frankenstein otherwise. Then, Frankenstein remembered. "Ah yes, the kids. Are they safe, at least?"

"What?" Asked M-21, shocked. He was definitely not expecting to meet Frankenstein here, or that he'd know what they had been up to.

"Yes," M-24 answered pretty much simultaneously. "We knocked them out. They aren't hurt."

"M-24, youâ€|"

"Let's not make a scene here, M-21," he said. "We can't walk away from this. Not now."

Without further ado, they made their way to the cafÃ© where Frankenstein ordered a vanilla milkshake for Raizel and an Americano for himself. The other two ordered lattes and they waited in complete silence until their orders arrived.

Raizel took to his drink with barely concealed delight and sipped at it with dignity mere mortals could never exhibit. Frankenstein suppressed a burst of fondness at the image and turned to look at the others, trying to focus at the task at hand.

"So," Frankenstein said, tasting the bitter blend on his tongue. "Why did you kidnap those children?"

M-21 crossed his arms and tried to give him an intimidating glare, growling when he spoke, though the effect was marred by the cheery atmosphere of the cafÃ© and the peppy music playing in the background: "What is it to you?"

"Yes," M-24 agreed. "What is it to you? You got out of the Union.

What more do you want?"

"Union?"

"They are calling themselves that now, after you'd escaped with so much data and information about our bases," M-21 said.

"I escaped with _what_?"

"The data?" M-24 said, puzzled. "The location of all the bases around the world, all our weapons, biological as well as mechanical alike, you escaped with them, right?"

Frankenstein pursed his lips. He couldn't remember if he did and that was worrying in itself. "I am not sure if I did."

"What are you talking about?" M-21 snapped. "We were all told to shoot you down on sight, if we ever crossed paths with you. You stole the only blueprints of our latest technologies and made off with it. How can you _not_ know?"

Frankenstein bowed his head and searched deep into his memories, but nothing seemed to come to mind. He raised his head after a few minutes and gave them an apologetic look. "I'm afraid I've lost my memories of that incident completely. If I did steal something, I can no longer remember it."

"Well," M-21 sighed in irritation. "That's just great. How is it that you have forgotten something so important? You were one of the Union's most brilliant scientists. You worked right under the authority of the First Elder. How can you be living _here_, in this little town, wasting your time taking care of kids?"

Raizel looked up at that, putting away his empty glass. He didn't seem offended at the way M-21 had alluded to him, but Frankenstein bristled anyway.

"That day," Frankenstein said. "I had jumped off the cliff the moment I had a lucid moment between the drug-fuelled haze they kept me in. I dived off a cliff because I didn't want to live like that anymore. It was just my luck that below the tree cover that broke my fall, there was a giant hidden lake. I fell into the water and only a few broken bones. Nothing I couldn't recover from, and it was _such_ a pity."

M-21 snapped his mouth close and glared at his cold latte. M-24 had wisely finished his, trying to not get between the two hot-headed men.

"I wanted to die, you know. It seemed like that was the only way I could stop them from exploiting my intelligence. I had never been allowed the free use of my own intellect. They harvested it and made it completely inaccessible to me by putting me on mind-controlling drugs. You have heard of those, right?" Not everyone was forced to take them, after all. A lot of people were kept in line by fear tactics, but it wasn't possible to harness true brilliance by _force_. It had to be coerced out through other, more sinister methods.

M-24 looked truly shocked. "They put you on drugs? But that would

kill you sooner or later, surely, they wouldn'tâ€|?"

Frankenstein smiled grimly and both M-24 and M-21 winced. These two had been rather naïve, and as such were never very successful as agents since they lacked the ruthless ways of most other, more favoured ones. It was no wonder that they were pretty much on the bottom rung of the ladder of the Organisation's hierarchy, though they had immense potential, if Frankenstein remembered right.

M-21 placed his hand on M-24's arm, sharing a look that conveyed something to the other that Frankenstein wasn't privy to. He finished his coffee and placed the cup back in the saucer with a delicate little clink. He turned to Raizel to see if there was something else he'd like, and found himself the sole focus of two concerned red eyes. Raizel's lips were thinned in displeasure and the look in his eyes was pained.

Was he concerned about Frankenstein? Or bothered by the almost flippant way Frankenstein treated his mortality?

"Do you want to try the mango flavour?" Frankenstein asked softly, smiling down at him to put him at ease.

Raizel nodded, but there was still a distraught cast to his expression that bothered Frankenstein. But there wasn't anything he could do about it though â€" or anyone, really.

"To lose your will â€" the very essence of humanity is the worst you can do to someone who possesses it," Raizel spoke quietly, breaking the awkward silence left behind by the earlier conversation. "It is a great crime to breach that inviolate space that exists within humans and then gain control of it. Humans are not meant to have someone else in their head." Raizel looked sadly at both Frankenstein and M-24. "Subjugating a human's body is already unforgivable â€" to do it to their minds as well is inconceivably awful."

M-21 and M-24 stared Raizel in shock whereas Frankenstein just felt a great sorrow in his heart. Not just because Raizel's words rang true; it was also because he knew how much Raizel blamed himself for the predicament they were in. The grief Raizel felt was smothering Frankenstein right this moment, robbing him the ability to even speak or comfort Raizel the way he should be.

It was then that M-24 clutched at his chest and made a distressed sound. "It hurts," he said faintly. "Looking at him â€" it hurts." He pointed in Raizel's direction, struggling to breathe.

Raizel's eyes widened and his body dissolved into the thin air, leaving both M-21 and M-24 stunned. They had been in a secluded spot so the sudden disappearing act hadn't attracted any untoward attention, but Frankenstein still felt like he had lost a few years of his life just to that. If he had any left to lose, that is.

"What the fuck?" M-21 was the first one to recover, clutching at M-24's arm and trying to shield him from a foe he couldn't even see.

Frankenstein pinched the bridge of his nose and reached out with his newly enhanced senses. He was able to locate Raizel fairly quickly. He was at home, probably at one of the windows and looking desolately

out of them. Raizel's soul felt wounded. He had been afraid of hurting someone with his enormous psychic field and Frankenstein had still lured him out. Not that he would blame Frankenstein.

No, he would only blame himself.

"Yeah, about that," Frankenstein said. Going to Raizel right now was futile. He'd just disappear further. He might even return to the castle and not let Frankenstein follow. It was a miracle as it is that he'd opted to return home, and not back to the prison. Frankenstein was grateful â€" he really was. "That person is psychic and can't really contain his powers that well. It's not his fault â€" he was hurt by the people who formed the Organisation and as such his powers leak out from his body. He's always in pain because of that, but to him violating someone's mental space is worse than the agony he goes through on a daily basis."

"Psychic?" M-21 repeated sceptically. The frown across his scarred mouth told Frankenstein just how much stock he put into Frankenstein's words.

"You saw him disappear right in front of your eyes. You can't say that it didn't happen," Frankenstein pointed out. Every nerve inside his body screamed at him to go to Raizel, to fold his little form in his arms and soothe his pain. He resisted the urge with great effort and focused on his duty â€" for he had one now. He had to save the kids these two had kidnapped, and perhaps help them out in the process, too.

"Why was it so painful? My heart hurt so much that I thought I was going to die," M-24 said hoarsely. His fingers were still trembling, his face was covered in cold sweat and he had an unhealthy pallor on his face. But that was to be expected: he had been hit with the full force of Raizel's sadness and guilty-conscience right in the face when he hadn't become used to it the way Frankenstein had.

He had no mental shields to speak of.

"That's just a fraction of what he feels every day," Frankenstein murmured, tracing the edge of the coffee cup. "He was just upset enough to forget that he shouldn't have let his own control slip."

"What is he?" M-21 asked, rubbing M-24's arm and scooting even closer to him as if he could physically soak up the awful feeling M-24 was suffering from.

"I don't know," Frankenstein admitted. "The others haven't told me, and I don't want to ask him personally. If he thinks I really need that information, he will tell me. That's what I believe." He did have some ideas, however, but this was no time for idle speculation.

They gave him a doubtful look.

"No, really." Frankenstein sighed and closed his eyes. "When the information becomes truly necessary, he will divulge it without question. Even if talking about it makes him sad."

"How can you trust him so much?" It was M-21 who asked him that, and

he seemed conflicted. "How can you trust something you can't even understand or know anything about?"

"Did you look at him?" Frankenstein asked with a soft laugh. When they nodded at him, understanding dawning in their eyes, he continued: "He just inspires confidence in a way nothing or no one else can. I have lived with him for almost eight months now and he has never harmed me. I can't explain it, but it's probably his aura? It's very calming and gentle. Just like him."

"So a form of mind-control?" M-21 bared his teeth in distaste, because just like Frankenstein it was a sore spot for him.

Frankenstein shook his head. "No. He doesn't use mind-control. What I feel from him is the warmth of his soul, if you can accept soul as a concept that exists. His soul shields me from my own demons, protecting me and holding me close as if I were something precious." He dipped his head to hide his fond smile. "Even someone like me?"

Silence prevailed awhile as each of them were lost in their own thoughts, working out the import of today's events. Eventually, Frankenstein brought up the reason they had come here in the first place.

"The kids, will you let them go? What even happened that you had to involve civilians?"

"We were transporting a shipment of goods to a certain place — sorry that we can't tell you where — and they saw us loading some of it up. They probably didn't think much of it, but it's the Union's policy to eliminate witnesses," M-24 answered, ignoring M-21's alarmed look.

"Have they seen your faces?" Frankenstein asked.

"Yes."

"When they saw you load the supplies or when you kidnapped them?"

"When we were loading up the supplies. We made sure to kidnap them quietly, though it was difficult in the museum. I didn't want to use the mind-wiping drug on them, though that would have left them alive. It's better to die than to have that used on you."

Frankenstein couldn't help agreeing. The resultant brain damage from that drug was more than dreadful.

"Still," Frankenstein said. "If they haven't seen who kidnapped them, I think it would be better to let them go. I can't overlook this, not when innocent lives are involved."

"You," M-21 said sharply, jabbing a finger in his direction in accusation. "You have killed plenty of innocents before."

"And not a day goes by when I don't try to remind myself of that," Frankenstein replied in a solemn voice. "Not a moment when I don't blame myself for killing them even though it wasn't done on purpose."

I don't want more people to lose their lives pointlessly. Surely even you understand that, M-21?"

M-21 wouldn't meet his eyes anymore.

"M-21, you know Dr. F is right."

"Frankenstein."

"What?" asked M-24, turning to throw him a quizzical look.

"Call me Frankenstein. That's my name now."

"Frankenstein, then," M-21 said gruffly and grabbed a nearby napkin, scribbled a few lines on it and pushed it into Frankenstein's hands. "That's where they are. Go and free them, if you want. We'll be off now. Stay out of sight, if you know what's good for you."

"I will." He knew that he had a chance at spending the rest of his life peacefully, but he also knew that he couldn't afford that. But no need to worry these two. And speaking of which: "Where are you two going?"

"Back to our mission," M-21 said in a sullen voice. "I'm sure the higher ups will be very interested to know why we were late in our delivery."

Frankenstein tapped his lips with a finger and regarded them with renewed interest. "You could also not go backâ€¦"

"What?" both M-21 and M-24 exclaimed together.

The thing was that Frankenstein remembered Dr. Crombel all too well. M-21 and M-24 were agents who worked under his authority, and as such were answerable to him in a direct chain of command. Frankenstein didn't want to send them back to that hell, not when he knew intimately just how it was. All of the researchers the Organisation had, only a handful weren't downright crazy. It didn't matter if it was Crombel or Aris or Ignès, Frankenstein hated the lot of them with a burning passion.

"Stay with us. It would help you heal, in any case," Frankenstein said. He knew Raizel wouldn't mind, in fact he would love to extend his protection to the people abused by those traitors. "Being with Raizel, you know that kid, will help you gain a better control of your mind and repel the others from the Organisation."

M-21 sat down slowly and stared at Frankenstein as if he had grown a second head.

"What you say sounds too good to be true. How do I know you aren't just going to use us?"

"That's a valid concern," Frankenstein said and gave the matter some thought. Then he produced a notebook from his pocket and wrote down a number. "I'll show you my trust first. Here's my phone number. Call me if you change your mind."

He was aware that they could just hand him over to the Organisation and earn some privileges, but what kind of life was that? It was an

acceptable risk " they could always go live somewhere else, that wasn't an issue, really.

"All right," M-21 said and walked out of the caf  with M-24 and Frankenstein watched them go.

He ordered another cup of hot coffee and mulled over the new information he had gained today. He wrote it down in his notebook using the cipher he usually didn't usually utilise, and tucked it away. Enough of that, he now had a much more important thing to do.

Go comfort Raizel and ply him with tea and sweets. And rescue the children, _of course_.

8. Chapter 8

Frankenstein had acquired the phone numbers of Ragar and Gejutel (and even the Lord) in the meantime, so he made sure to give Gejutel a call and ask him to pick up the children. True to their words, he found the children unscathed lying in a heap in a dirty abandoned building. He carried them to the car and put them there safely and asked Gejutel to drive them to the local police station. He had first considered taking them to the house and letting them wake up there, but then he thought better of it. It would endanger Raizel and raise too many questions, so he chose to bring them to the proper authorities first. Even if it that move meant exposing himself to potential Organisation spies.

He had called in advance to let them know where he had found the kids and by the time he reached the police station, the entire town seemed to be galvanised by the sudden discovery. The police officials were waiting for him at the entrance of the station and they helped him take the kids out of the car. When Raizel climbed out of the backseat of the car, though Frankenstein knew for a fact that he had not been present when they had put the kids back there, he tried not to let his surprise show. Raizel placed his hand in Frankenstein's and followed him into the police station, destroying Frankenstein's plans to keep him away from the spotlight.

Well, it couldn't be helped, then. He wasn't that annoyed " or at all, in fact.

Inside, there was a small crowd waiting for him. The kids were taken to a different spot where medical experts looked over them and declared that they'd just been knocked out with some superficial injuries. Frankenstein, Gejutel and Raizel were ushered into one of the cabins where they had a few people waiting for them.

"These are officer Na Yonsu and officer An Sangeen, down from the Yard to help us with the case," the officer in charge said and offered them all a seat.

Raizel sat between Gejutel and Frankenstein and kept holding onto Frankenstein, whether for Raizel's own benefit or for his, he did not know. But he appreciated it all the same.

Officer Na Yonsu looked at the reports and then at Frankenstein, her eyes narrowed in thinly-veiled suspicion. "You say you found the kids

by the roadside, really? How can we know that you aren't the kidnappers?"

Frankenstein shrugged. "Why would I kidnap a bunch of kids and then bring them to the police station without exacting any ransom? Or, you know," he said, leaning forward with a mocking smile on his face. "Why would I cast so much suspicion on myself by doing so if I was the one who had kidnapped them in the first place?"

"Because then you could escape the suspicion by bringing them," officer Yonsu said, crossing her arms.

"Are you insinuating that I would value some reverse psychology gambit over my safety? Or the safety of the one who depends on me?" Frankenstein arched an eyebrow, feeling more and more unamused by the second.

The woman in front of him frowned, giving a sideways look to the other officer who had been silent so far.

"Mr. Lee," the man began. "I know you are feeling a little upset for being interrogated in this manner, but please try to understand. We don't want to cause an international scandal. Our country is not known for such crimes, and we'd like to keep it so. The South Korean government was very anxious that their citizens be returned without harm, and I'm glad that it happened this way. However," he leaned forward and regarded Frankenstein with a sharp look in his eyes. "Forgive us if we want to be thorough."

"I can understand that," Frankenstein said. "But you realise you are making me regret pulling these kids off the road in this freezing weather?" It was patently untrue, but he was irked because Raizel was here, being subjected to such a treatment. "Next time I want to be a Good Samaritan, I'd remember this."

Yonsu bristled and Sangeen seemed to hesitate. "Okay," he conceded, raising his hands in a helpless gesture. Yonsu shot him an annoyed look, but he didn't glance at her. "I guess we have been a little rude, but you can understand our agitation. It's a good thing that the kids have returned safely. Still," he eyed the three of them. "I'd like to see your IDs etc."

"Sure," Frankenstein said and took out his wallet, handing him his citizen card "fake, of course, but since it was old and the data had been since destroyed, there was no way to prove it otherwise."

Fortunately, neither of the two objected to it. They handed it back to him and turned at Gejutel who gave them a wholly unimpressed look.

"Does it look like I carry such a thing on me like this lout here?" Then he produced a driving license anyway. "This is all I have."

After dispensing with that, they cleared their throat and looked at Raizel but thought better than asking for a child's papers. Frankenstein was glad too, because had they suspected him, he wasn't sure what he would have done. To them, that is. The silence in the room was just beginning to grow awkward that the door opened and

the children poured in.

"Hello!" they greeted and crowded near Frankenstein and Raizel.

"We heard you saved us?" One of the girls said, giving him a small smile. Her English wasn't that good, but she had put all her effort into speaking.

"Yes, I saw you guys and brought you here," Frankenstein said evenly, trying not to show his relief on his face. He was glad that they were not harmed.

"Thank you so much!" The other girl piped up. Her accent was much better, and she seemed a lot more confident as well. "I'm Im Suyi. This is Yuna," she pointed to her friend who had spoken first.

"Yeah, thank you so much," the boys joined in as well. "I'm Han Shinwoo, and this is Woo Ikhan."

"Hello," Frankenstein greeted, smiling. They were kind of adorable, after all. Having gone through a potentially traumatising experience, and yet they wanted to come thank the people who had rescued them. These children were brave and sweet and Frankenstein couldn't help feeling certain keenness towards them.

"And who is this?" Yuna asked, looking down at Raizel.

"I'm Raizel," he replied serenely. As if he wasn't bothered by so many children surrounding him and talking to him, despite having lived in isolation for so long. Or maybe he had gotten used to it since he received so much attention in the supermarkets.

The kids chattered a little in Korean, before they turned to him again. Frankenstein couldn't understand the language, but going by Raizel's emotions, it did seem like they were cooing over how cute he was. He had a tiny little blush and he was glancing away for the first time.

It even managed to surprise the usually unflappable Gejutel.

"Oh yeah," Shinwoo said suddenly, switching back to English. "I wanted to give you something, as a thank you for saving us!"

They all turned to him as he rummaged inside his bag, face twisting in concentration as he searched and then his face morphed into an expression of triumph. "Here!" He proclaimed, putting the prize on Raizel's palm and giving him a thumbs up. "Thanks, Rai!"

"Rai?" Frankenstein echoed, feeling a little faint at the thing that was in Raizel's hands and he was cradling it with so much care and at that nickname. The kids barely even knew him and they had given him a diminutive name already?

Yuna was the one who looked up, a guilty look on her face. "Um, is that bad? His name is a little hard to say, so..."

"It's fine," Raizel replied before Frankenstein could. He kept on holding the item in his open palms, regarding it with intense

curiosity.

"Okay!" Yuna smiled at him and reached out, pausing only at the last second and her smile turned sheepish. "Is it okay?"

Raizel gave her a nod. She patted his shoulder, only a little awkward, and then the rest of them followed. They each gave Raizel small pats and then filtered out of the room, seemingly satisfied. Raizel watched them leave with a look that could be best described as longing and Frankenstein swallowed, forcing down a lump down his throat.

Of course. Raizel had been unbearably lonely for such a long period of time. And even though they were together now, it wasn't as if he led a very social life. He had to be secretive, after all, or else he'd be caught by the agents of the Organisation. He had been, in fact, and it was just sheer dumb luck that he had known them. Had it been someone like Jake or Marie – another set of Crombel's agents, he'd be forced to make a run for it.

"Right," he said, clearing his throat and facing the officers again. "Can we go now?"

"Huh? Yes, certainly," Officer Sangeen said and went to the door, holding it open for them.

Frankenstein took Raizel by the shoulder and guided him outside with Gejutel bringing up the rear. They walked to the car in silence and it wasn't until they were on their way home that Gejutel glanced in the rear-view mirror and posed the question that had to have been bothering him for a long while.

"What's that thing Sir Raizel is holding?"

"Instant Ramyeon," Frankenstein replied tonelessly and did not answer more of Gejutel's inane queries. He was still a little miffed at being called a lout, after all.

* * *

><p>The officers did not bother him again, however, despite his worst fears. For the first few days he was really on the edge because he kept expecting them to pop up at his front door, demanding answers. But nothing of that sort happened. Though, he was only able to relax when Ragar surreptitiously told him that the Lord had taken care of it. How, Frankenstein had mouthed at him, but Ragar only had shaken his head. He wasn't sure why they had been whispering, but that was how things seemed to be sometimes with these people.

And Frankenstein could roll with that.

What he couldn't abide by was Raizel's new obsession. He had held that ridiculous packet of instant ramyeon in his hands until Frankenstein offered to cook it for him. And when he had eaten it, he had looked so absolutely enchanted by it that he kept making requests to make more. Which meant more trips to the supermarket, but they weren't able to find the same brand or quality of instant ramyeon, so Frankenstein had added it to the lists that Ragar had to deliver.

And he had better deliver because he couldn't stand the way Raizel looked at him.

Until then, Frankenstein embarked on a quest to learn how to make ramyeon from scratch instead and obtained much better results. The way Raizel's face brightened was motivator enough for him to get better at it. And that was why it took him a while to notice that he'd been spending more and more time not obsessing over his revenge and the past. Instead he spent most of his days running around for Raizel's sake, or with him, drinking tea and watching the telly as if there was nothing better in life to do.

What could be better than this? He had never imagined having such a peaceful life. He had never imagined it for himself, at least. He could admit that he just liked being with Raizel without worrying about consequences. This was the first time in his life when someone needed him as he was, without wanting to exploit his intelligence or using him to hurt others.

No, Raizel just appreciated his company. Liked to sit with him during the warm afternoons. Liked to walk around the town in wintry nights, huddling under warm coats and observing the stillness of a sleeping town. Liked doing mundane things like go to supermarkets and buy something like broccoli. Which, Frankenstein was amused to note, he didn't even like. He tolerated it in the cart only for Frankenstein's sake ever since Frankenstein had explained to him about nutrition and balanced diet.

Today for instance, it was spinach and Raizel looked at it as if it had personally offended him.

"This is good for the health," Frankenstein pointed out, trying to suppress his amusement and failing.

Raizel reached out and added a little bit more to their cart upon hearing that and walked away, not willing to let Frankenstein see his expression. Something quite like happiness bloomed deep in Frankenstein's chest. It was in moments like these that Frankenstein didn't know what to do with himself. There was no way to contain what he felt inside, but no way to express it in words either. Except, he knew that Raizel could feel it.

At least, that was what Frankenstein concluded by the way Raizel's footsteps paused momentarily. He didn't look back nor did he make any comment "there was just something in his silence that conveyed to Frankenstein that it had not gone unnoticed.

Frankenstein covered his face with a hand and smiled into it, before pushing his cart forward. He had taken but two steps that the world seemed to simply fall away. He blinked, disoriented by the sudden darkness. He tried to speak, but no words came out. He couldn't move either "just stood still and helpless as his body was pulled along whatever it was that happened to him.

And just as suddenly as the darkness had encompassed him, his vision was filled with lights and shapes and faces "none he could recognise, however, and that was worrying in itself. He was lying down, it seemed, on the floor and he was surrounded by several men and women, all dressed in the same sort of clothes. The only one that stood out was a small, dark-haired child with unusually coloured

eyes.

He blinked and tried to sit up, only to find it impossible to do so without assistance. Several hands reached out to pull him back up and he sat, propped against a rack of merchandise " a shop, then? He became aware of a slow and deep pain in his head and an even worse one in his chest.

"Mr. Lee?" Some of them seemed to ask, again and again until he gathered that they were talking to him.

Was that what he called himself?

"Yes?" he said thickly, still trying to make sense of the world and himself.

"Are you all right? Do you want to see a doctor, maybe?" A girl asked. There seemed to be tears in her eyes and her voice trembled. Was the person she so concerned about him? He couldn't understand it.

"No," he said. He tried to think and kept on drawing a blank. Everything was like an empty canvas " there were images in his head, he could identify things, but he couldn't make any sense of anything and that terrified him. A slow panic started to build up inside him, not knowing where he was, who he was with and what was going on.

"I'll take him home," the child said and grabbed his arm, pulling him to his feet with surprising strength.

Home? What was home? Did he even have a home?

No time to contemplate that as the child all but dragged him out of the building, kept on walking until they were out of sight of all those anxious faces and turned into an alley where no prying eyes could get to them. He snatched his arm away from that grip and fell to his knees, gasping and panting, totally and utterly lost.

"Frankenstein," the child said. He did not reach out again, however, which was a small mercy.

"You " you know my name," he accused.

"And you know mine."

"I " I don't." He clutched his head and curled into himself, putting as much distance between the two of them. "You are like them. You feel like them."

The face in front of him transformed at his words, to the extent that it was painful to even look upon. Frankenstein wasn't going to feel sorry for something like this, however.

"Yes," he admitted and stepped away, giving Frankenstein the space he had wanted. "Forgive me." His tone was sorrowful and his crimson eyes became clouded. "However, you are no longer with them."

"You " "

"I'm not one of them," the child cut him off. "You're far away from them. You just have suffered from something like a stroke, I think, and as such can't remember your present."

"How can I believe you? Anything you say?" Frankenstein said coldly, climbing back to his feet and looking down on him. "Don't think I'm fooled by your appearance. You have the same aura as the ones who â€" who â€" He clutched at his head and groaned. He didn't want to remember. He really didn't.

"If punishing me for the awful things they did to you makes you feel better, you're welcome to do so."

Frankenstein looked up at that. There was no inflection in that voice, only quiet resignation and an acceptance that he'd never felt from the others. He raised his fist and swung it, narrowly missing the child's cheek and struck the brick wall next to his face. It stung, but he knew there was no way he could actually hit a child's face. So this was the next best thing.

The child took his hand in his, frowning at the split knuckles and breathed on it softly. The pain receded. The wounds didn't knit back together and neither did the bleeding stop, but it still helped. Frankenstein gritted his teeth. The child let his hand go with a desolate look on his face.

And then that small body transformed into a bigger one, growing to an adult size â€" a height that rivalled his, and Frankenstein forgot to breathe, almost. If it had been awful to see a child's face twisted in pain, and yet this was just as bad. But inhuman beauty wouldn't bother Frankenstein for a long period of time. He was used to it, living in the Organisation for as long as he did, surrounded by beings like him. Even if he was far lovelier than they could ever dream to be.

This wasn't the time to be distracted by looks, however. How did that make him any different than the likes of Dr. Aris?

He struck out, frustrated, only to recoil a little when he realised that the child â€" no, the man in front of him refused to dodge his blow. He tried to pull back, but it connected with his cheek anyway, splitting the tender skin and drawing blood. That dark head snapped to the side and remained that way, as if offering himself up for Frankenstein's use â€" inviting him to vent his pain and anger on a completely unresisting target.

"No," he said, drawing back. "Even if you don't give a shit about this, even if it doesn't hurt you, I'm not going to derive any satisfaction from hurting you. That's not the point."

"Then," the man asked, still not looking at him. "What would make you happy?"

"Why do you care?" Frankenstein asked, annoyed. He wasn't like the others, was he? He couldn't be â€" none of them would have tolerated Frankenstein landing a blow on them. They didn't like being pulled down to a human's level, anything that would besmirch their honour, their dignity. And here was a being, completely willing to be roughened up to please a human. If Frankenstein could care, he would

care right about now.

But the man did not explain his motivations.

"You want to make it up to me?" Frankenstein asked, crossing his arms and leaning against the opposite wall. He was irritated â€" really irritated. How could he let one of these things to get to him? "Stop fucking with my head. Fix my memory. You guys are the ones who messed it up, didn't you?"

"I â€" I cannot restore the memory that has been lost before," the man replied, finally looking back at him. His expression was unreadable now. "I can restore the ones you lost just now â€" even if it would be more to my benefit than yours, if you only knew."

"How so?"

"We have been living together," the man explained. "You are very kind to me. If I restore those memories, perhaps that wouldn't be right."

Frankenstein considered this. It didn't make any sense. Why would he be â€" ah, that did explain a few things.

"I don't remember your kind, do I? In my current memories?"

The man shook his head. "No, not consciously so."

"Then make me remember this too. Restore everything you can."

"It will cause you pain," the man said apologetically. Guilt and pain seemed to weigh heavy on him and Frankenstein could feel it.

He didn't want to. He brushed it aside and bared his teeth in defiance. "I don't care. Restore everything that is within your power to do so. Save my life too, if you can. If you feel so bad."

The man started. "I can't â€" I'm unable to interfere with the natural order of things."

"It sounds a lot more like you don't want to rather than you can't. And what," Frankenstein said bitterly. "Is natural about this?"

Indecision flitted across his features for a moment before his face hardened. He seemed to come to a decision and straightened himself. "All right. I will grant your wish."

"Wait!"

They both turned their heads as someone shouted from the mouth of the alley. It was a tall, blond man â€" regal-looking â€" and yet another one of them. Frankenstein scowled at him, angry that he'd interrupt right at this moment. Just when he was about to make them pay for all the shit they had put him through.

"Raizel," the blond ignored him in favour of the other â€" was his name Raizel? â€" and asked in a concerned voice: "Are you sure?"

"Yes, this is my decision."

"He is not in his right mind. He will not like it when he wakes up." He did not look agitated; however, Frankenstein could tell that he was worried about something. Not that the human in front of them would gain a benefit — no, it went deeper than that. He wasn't sure why he could tell, but.

"Hey!" He exclaimed. "Why would I not like the fact that my life was saved?"

The blond gave him a strange look: sadness mixed with regret, and something else he couldn't quite place but he knew he had seen it before. He did know these people. He was sure of it. So perhaps there was some merit in what Raizel had said to him.

"It's my decision and his request," Raizel said. He wouldn't be moved now and the blond seemed to realise that as well.

"All right." He stepped back without a single protest, resigned.

Raizel gave him a small smile. "Thank you, Lord."

"You don't have to call me that anymore." The smile was returned, just as fond, and Frankenstein felt as if he was intruding upon a moment not meant for his eyes.

Too bad he was going to stay right here until the matter was resolved.

Raizel didn't reply to him. Instead he closed his eyes and started glowing, covered in pure white light that seemed to originate from behind him. It shone brighter and brighter until Frankenstein had to shield his eyes to avoid getting his retinas burned. A great wind stirred in the small space of the alley and Frankenstein watched, fascinated, as the light coalesced into two large shapes, one on each side of Raizel's back.

Wings.

Frankenstein couldn't breathe. Couldn't move.

Raizel placed his palm on Frankenstein's face, a touch so gentle and warm that tears welled in Frankenstein's eyes. He wasn't sure why either.

"My life —" Raizel's voice was filled with power. Something deeper and more ancient than mankind. "Is now your life. Your soul is now under my protection — I will not allow any more harm to it, not even from time itself. By the powers vested in me, I have the absolute dominion over death and this is my will."

The words wound around him, scalding him like a brand. It didn't burn however — just weighed him down. He could feel it sink deep, deep inside him and he knew the truth. He knew what Raizel was, in essence, and it both terrified him and awed him. He shut his eyes and collapsed, unable to withstand the pressure that bore down on him from the might that seemed to flow inside him.

Before he completely lost himself to that overpowering surge, he was able to recognise it for what it was.

Raizel's soul was very, very warm. So large that he had no chance of encompassing it in his puny human body, and yet Raizel had made sure he could withstand it, because it was also overwhelmingly gentle. So kind that he had given him a piece of it when he didn't have any left for himself.

Frankenstein struggled to open his eyes, hold on just long enough to make sure Raizel was _all right_, and of course he wasn't. The wings disappeared in a burst of light and Raizel fell down on the ground first, his body nearly transparent. He didn't even seem to be breathing anymore.

And Frankenstein knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that he had fucked up beyond comprehension.

9. Chapter 9

Frankenstein came to himself with a loud gasp. He was no longer in that tiny alley. No, he had returned to his house that he shared with â€

Oh god, Raizel.

He stood up, enduring the dizzying spell that threatened to scourge his stomach of its contents. He needed â€ he needed so badly to see Raizel. Because he couldn't â€ hadn't just ruined the only one good thing in his life, had he?

"Sit down," the Lord said, tugging on his arm and pushing him down physically. "You're in no state to walk around."

Frankenstein sat down, numb. He couldn't look Emsworth in the eyes. He couldn't face any of them.

"Don't blame yourself," the Lord said kindly. His grip loosened. "It was Raizel's decision."

"No," Frankenstein said with a hollow laugh. "I forced him. I know his nature â€ I forced him because even then I was aware of the way he works. I knew subconsciously."

"The only reason he didn't do this in the first place was because he knew it would bother you. But when you asked him yourselfâ€|"

"How is he?" Frankenstein asked dully.

The Lord's expression turned grim. "He's not dead yet."

That didn't comfort Frankenstein at all. He clutched the hem of his pyjamas â€ it seemed like they had changed him while he was out of it â€ and stared at the wall. He swallowed down bile and tried not to let any sound escape him.

"With a little rest, he will be all right," the Lord continued, having given Frankenstein enough space to compose himself. "He won't die just yet, because your lives are inextricably intertwined

now."

"So he will live," Frankenstein repeated, voice raw and aching. "To sustain my life."

The Lord nodded, agony writ on his features like a live thing. "As long as it's in his power to do so. And when he cannot, he will find another way to maintain your life before he is gone forever."

"I don't," he swallowed " tears, vomit, he was no longer sure what. "I didn't " He did ask for this. He was the reason that this had happened. He couldn't push the blame on anyone else, nor could he wash his hands off it.

"It would not do to blame yourself, when it isn't your fault. He wouldn't want you to." The Lord placed his hand on Frankenstein's shoulder, grounding him, bringing him back.

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't use your powers on me," Frankenstein said, resenting the fact that he was feeling better. He didn't deserve to. "Not when it's bound to hurt you."

The hand didn't withdraw, but the pressure behind it lightened. The Lord chuckled softly. "It seems wrong that I should stay untouched when he " "

"He wouldn't want you to use that kind of reasoning," Frankenstein said. "He doesn't want to burden you when you are already supposed to be free."

The smile on the Lord's face died. He pulled his hand away finally and folded it in his lap. "You and he," he began, then took a deep breath and sighed. "He gave you his soul, so in a way, you two are a shared existence. He had to make you this way so that you'd be able to withstand the pressure of his powers."

"But not what torments him so," Frankenstein said, feeling sicker as knowledge poured into him now that he'd learned to tap into it. "He accepted my pain too. Took it upon himself so as to spare me."

The Lord remained silent. There was nothing he could provide as comfort, not even empty words. Frankenstein, for his part, now was in full possession of all his memories, everything that had happened to him, back then in the Organisation, every single thing restored to him because Raizel had willed it so. And yet, the only thing on his mind was what he'd put Raizel through. And how unforgivable it all was.

He deserved to die. More than anything, and yet, Raizel had ensured " on the cost of everything " that he wouldn't. Frankenstein laughed at the irony of his own request, or tried, at any rate. It only came out as a horrible, strangled noise he could no longer control.

* * *

><p>"Here," he said, voice still thick and scratchy. "I made you some ramyeon."<p>

Raizel took the bowl from his hands and stared at the piping hot

soup, the perfectly cooked noodles and the egg on top of it. His hands trembled only vaguely now. "Thank you," he said quietly.

Frankenstein sat down next to him and tried not to openly grimace. It had been a couple of days and Raizel still looked so frail. He didn't move much, he barely spoke and he wouldn't eat unless Frankenstein really insisted. Frankenstein knew that eating human food wouldn't nourish him, but it was a ritual between them and he was loath to break it.

He wasn't inclined to talk about what happened between them either. Where would he start anyway? Asking him so many questions or remonstrating with him seemed like an awful thing to do. He felt that if he even spoke too loudly, Raizel might just disappear from the force of it.

His skin looked papery, his hair lank and his face was drawn. He was still in his adult form, unable to return to the smaller one because of how weak he was, even though it was painful.

"You do not eat," Raizel said, taking a delicate bite from the meat he had put into the broth. "Yet you insist on feeding me though it benefits me none."

"I don't know what else to do for you," Frankenstein said, unable to contain the anguish in his voice.

"Not starving yourself would be a good place to start," Raizel said. He hadn't stopped eating however, so that was a good thing.

"I'm not starving myself. I did try to eat, today too, but it all comes back up. There's no space inside of me other than the â€" He cut himself off and bit his lip, drawing blood. It healed right away, much to his annoyance.

"Are you angry with me?"

"You?" What an idea. "No, god, no. I'm angry at myself. For letting this happen. For draining your life. For hitting you and making you bleed. I cannot even count how many awful things I have done to you."

"Not on purpose," Raizel said gently after he'd finished eating. He set the empty bowl aside and faced Frankenstein with a steady look on his face.

"Doesn't mean it didn't happen," Frankenstein said. It was ridiculous that Raizel wouldn't see his point, when he loved to blame himself for the wrongs someone else committed. "Just because I wasn't in the right mind or didn't know what I was doing, it doesn't absolve me from the crime of causing you pain. If you stab someone by mistake, it does not mean they aren't going to bleed just because you didn't mean to hurt them."

Raizel kept his silence then, either realising that what Frankenstein said was correct or not wanting to upset him further.

"Am I immortal now or something?" Frankenstein asked eventually. The question had been bothering him for some time already, so he might as

well ask now that Raizel could feel well enough to talk.

"Yes," Raizel said, choosing his words carefully. "In a manner of speaking. As long as I exist, there is no danger to you whatsoever. Even if someone were to burn you down, you'd be reborn from the ashes. Not," he looked a little ill as he spoke, "that I wish that kind of thing to happen to you. However, if I dieâ€¦"

"The Lord mentioned something about that."

"Yes, if I can find a way to sustain your life with something other than my soul itself, you would continue living as long as you want or as long as that thing holds out."

"If I chose to die now, would that fix you somewhat? Please don't lie to me."

Colour drained from Raizel's already pallid face. He shook his head, unable to speak and hunched into himself as if Frankenstein's words had physically wounded him.

"No, I'm sorry," he said hurriedly, wringing his hands before reaching out and taking Raizel's in his. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that."

Raizel did not pull away, and for that Frankenstein was grateful. He cradled Raizel's hand in his palms, gently, carefully and tried not to panic at how light it was. How insubstantial. Thinking of those things would only sadden Raizel and him, and through their mental feedback loop, it would only increase the misery on both ends.

"I knew it would cause you grief when I made this decision. If someone ought to feel guilty, it shouldn't be you," Raizel told him.

"No," Frankenstein said. "Let's stop this because no matter how much we argue over this, we can't ever settle this matter. There's another, more important issue that I'd like to address. What can I do for you now? Is there any way in which I can assist you?" It was a circular discussion, one that wouldn't benefit the either of them. He'd rather spend his time trying to come up with ways to undo the damage Raizel had done to himself. However:

Raizel gave it some thought. "I'm not sure. I don't think so."

Frankenstein's heart plummeted to his stomach and he sighed. "Ah, so I'm really useless then."

"No, it's fine if you stay here. By my side. Unlessâ€¦" There was a longer pause during which he seemed to mull over something. Then, Raizel said in a softer voice. "Unless you'd rather not."

Frankenstein regarded him carefully. As always when Raizel wanted something but wasn't sure he was allowed to have it, he'd look away, he'd act as if he wasn't important enough or just try to make himself less conspicuous. It was both endearing and frustrating to watch, so Frankenstein made up his mind. He took a while deliberately because he didn't want to come across as making a rash decision. He knew he

wasn't, and he certainly didn't want Raizel thinking that.

He got up from his seat and got down on the floor, knees on the ground and elbows propped on the bed and continued holding onto Raizel's hand. "I promise I'll always stay by your side. Since I can't die, that works out in your favour â€" and mine too, of course. I'll never abandon you, this I promise. You gave me my life, so it's yours now. It belongs to you â€" completely and utterly."

Raizel did not reply at once. His Adam's apple moved a little as he swallowed and then his face took on a full-blown blush. It surprised Frankenstein, but not enough to drop his hand or stop kneeling. It was a bit like him swearing undying loyalty to a king, and while Raizel was no royalty, he was actually something much, much higher. It made sense for Frankenstein to do it like this, in its own way, though he wasn't sure Raizel was all that keen on it.

"Is that all right?" He asked, squeezing Raizel's hand and smiling at him.

"Yes," Raizel replied. His voice was just a little shy, just a little hesitant, but he could hear the note of happiness buried deep within it.

Too bad, thought Frankenstein, that he was stuck in this adult body. Had it been a child, Frankenstein certainly would have given him a long, warm hug. He could, still, of course but the idea of holding Raizel when he looked like this was just a little bit embarrassing. He did hug him before in this form, but that was back when they hadn't known each other like this. They weren't this close either.

He could also feel Raizel's presence in his mind, now, just on the periphery, and the dense ball of warmth that resided within him now, where his power thrummed incessantly. It was strange, something so foreign embedded deep into his body â€" and yet, it was neither invasive nor uncomfortable. It was as if Raizel's soul had blended seamlessly with his and completed it, filled the vacancies that every human being seemed to have. Why else would people go all their lives, searching for something that always seemed beyond their grasp? Frankenstein had finally found it, however.

He did not feel lonely, not even when Raizel had not woken up and he'd felt really, really miserable. Even in those moments, he could feel another within himself, trying desperately to provide some comfort. Was that how it was supposed to be when you were loved? Because what else could this be, if not love? The deep and unnameable emotion that Raizel felt for him, it had to be love.

Unselfish, giving and needlessly kind.

Just like Raizel himself.

It should have been terrifying, to be on the receiving end of such an intense feeling, and yet it wasn't. Frankenstein had spent a long time away from people, laying low and not wanting to connect to another human being. His time in the Organisation had left him incapable of feeling for anyone in any capacity, or so he had thought anyway. Innocent children were his weakness, and he had known it. Was it strange that Raizel's form had been that of a child and he

had been drawn to it pretty much immediately? He knew it wasn't by design. The smaller the form Raizel used the less power it cost to maintain.

Besides, a child's form was naturally something that was pure and guileless, so it was perfect for a being like Raizel. He hadn't been able to see it before. But when he looked at him now, being able to almost see through him " in more ways than one " he knew it to be true.

When Raizel hadn't left his position, when he hadn't lost his glory and might, his job had been to take lives. He had power over all living beings, and he was their guide in their last moments on earth: a psychopomp. It wasn't as much that he brought death " no, it would be more accurate that he gave them peace when they had none as long as they dwelled on the earth.

As a being of power, of course he wasn't attendant to every single living soul on the earth. He was ubiquitous: his power spreading over the cosmos and able to touch every single living thing. The scope of it was terrifying, and yet sitting here, in front of Raizel, looking into his tired face, he didn't feel any such thing.

No wonder he had been able to tear Frankenstein's soul away from the natural cycle of death and rebirth. He had power, but he was no longer allowed to make use of it, and yet he had for Frankenstein's sake. He really shouldn't have.

"Frankenstein," Raizel spoke, curling his fingers around Frankenstein's hands and holding them close. "Don't let my past weigh on your conscience. It was a choice I made for myself, you have nothing to blame yourself for."

The sincerity of Raizel's words was almost too much to bear and Frankenstein raised their joined hands to his face, hiding it from view and shuddered. No matter how much Raizel tried to reassure him, he knew what he had done. While he knew that the decision to save him was made by Raizel on his own free will " and that was important to him " and yet Frankenstein knew that if Raizel hadn't been the way he was, Frankenstein might have manipulated him into doing such a thing for him regardless of the consequences.

A being of power, like the Others, the ones that had hurt Raizel so terribly, they had destroyed Frankenstein's life. Why would it have been wrong to take advantage of one such as them? Raizel was blameless, yes; however, Frankenstein hadn't known that. He'd felt it, because Raizel's aura was far too pure, but was it something he could have really trusted? When he had all his memories, like right now, he couldn't even an ounce of affection for anyone who possessed powers that weren't human. Except Raizel.

He had wandered the earth, like a puppy that hadn't even opened its eyes, so lost and confused without his memories, without access to much of his intellect and knowledge. He had been an easy prey for the likes of the Lord and his followers. They had manipulated him into working for them, and yes, he had been so muddled, so resigned to his fate that he had agreed. If he could see them now, when he was no longer aching from the guilt of having hurt Raizel, he wouldn't be able to control himself.

Had he met Raizel when he was fully aware of himself, would he have manipulated him from the _get-go_?

The thought scared him. To think that his real personality was what he had been in that alley, coolly assessing Raizel's personality and exploiting it instead of the kind, gentle self he had displayed when he had first met that lonely child in an abandoned castle?

Frankenstein's knees ached from kneeling for so long and his eyes stung. Guilt clawed at his insides, peeling away layers and layers of self-assurance he had covered himself with. How could Raizel even _stand_ to be in his presence when Frankenstein had â€

Raizel wrapped an arm around Frankenstein's shoulders and pulled him up, displaying strength that shouldn't be possible, and drew him close. It wasn't a proper hug, no, but it achieved what Raizel had wanted from it, on the surface. It calmed Frankenstein down despite himself. He buried his face into Raizel's shoulder and let himself be comforted by the one he had wronged the most, eyes dry and head empty of all thought except of how _close_ Raizel was.

10. Chapter 10

It was hard to get himself to eat again, and for sure, he could just starve until his body repaired itself. He was tempted to test just how much he could put his body through before the regenerative powers he had gained from Raizel's intervention kicked in. If it hadn't come at such a cost, Frankenstein would have already started experimenting and finding out the best way to utilise it against his enemies.

Food tasted like ashes in his mouth and even the thought of revenge was cold comfort. He ate, if only to reassure Raizel that he wasn't trying to rebel against what Raizel had done for him. A part of him wanted to, but he had crushed it as soon as he'd thought of it. Raizel wasn't a valid target to vent his frustrations.

Frankenstein cooked and cleaned, because doing housework was all he had left for himself. At least when he didn't have his memories, he spent hours poring over the scant few he _did_ have. He would sort them, catalogue them painstakingly and obsess over little details. He had read his notes. Even for one in such a disadvantaged position, he had tried his best to survive, to resist his fate and fight what had been inevitable.

None of that mattered now.

Again, he had made too much food. More than he was willing to eat and more than what Raizel would willingly partake. He still took meals up to Raizel â€ for he was unable to come down with his own strength â€ and he watched over as Raizel ate. It was the only time he felt even a little bit of peace, and he suspected that it was why Raizel would eat whatever Frankenstein brought him. He wouldn't even refuse green vegetables right now, though Frankenstein did not have the heart to test out that theory.

He set two plates on a tray, one for himself and one for Raizel, and walked upstairs. As soon as he entered Raizel's room, his phone started to ring and he almost let go of the heavy tray in surprise.

Who would call him? Who even knew his number? He placed his burden on the side table and plucked his phone from the back pocket.

It wasn't a number he had seen before, but it was at least not from outside the United Kingdom. He dithered in Raizel's room for a few more moments before excusing himself and taking the call right outside the door.

"Hello," he said, shutting the door behind him so that Raizel wouldn't be able to hear. Not that he could prevent him from finding out, but.

"Dr. F?" A familiar voice and Frankenstein found himself tensing further. He'd forgotten about these two because of all that went down. "This is M-21."

"Yes, what is it?" He asked.

"The kids, they have been kidnapped again."

Frankenstein almost dropped his phone. _Oh no_. "What?"

"Jake and Marie," M-21 whispered over the line. "They caught wind of our activities as they were also in the same country and they decided to _clean up our mess_."

Frankenstein did not know what to say. Or do, for that matter. Given his current predisposition, he did not really care if a bunch of kids got themselves kidnapped. And knowing those two, they'd certainly end up dead within a few hours. He just didn't know if Jake would shoot them or pummel them to death with his fists alone. That was the kind of man he was and Frankenstein had never liked him. Still, he shouldn't care. Immortal though he may be, he had no desire to out himself to the Organisation and lose his normal life.

What normal life, he asked himself, disgusted.

"Where are they?" He found himself saying into the speaker. There was no way he could abandon a bunch of innocent children now, could he? No matter what kind of a monster he was. He did not know what he could do for them either, but he had to try, or else he wouldn't be able to live with himself. And considering he was immortal, that would be a hell of a lot time spending loathing yourself.

Over the line M-21 told him everything.

* * *

><p>The children came from a kind world, a gentle world where they could go to school, have friends and normal problems like exams and love troubles. Frankenstein wouldn't presume that their lives were easy, but he could at least think that they didn't have to struggle for survival like he and the other children caught by the Organisation had to. Like he had to. He would never want such a fate for someone else.<p>

And for that purpose, he was willing to go out and do something about it.

He set everything in order and put on some nondescript clothes. He

would have to take the train the London and then find the address M-21 had provided him with. He just hoped the kids wouldn't already be dead by the time he got there. The only thing left for him to do now was to slip out of the house before Raizel got the wind of this. He knew that Raizel would also want to help the children " there was no way he wouldn't. Using more powers in his condition wasn't going to do him any favours either.

He picked one of his journals and tore an empty page out of it, scribbled a hasty apology and bit his lip. He wasn't sure what Raizel would think of it. He should probably call someone to make sure that Raizel was okay. Frankenstein would return, of course, but in what state, he did not know. If he failed to save the children, he might not be ready to face Raizel. But abandoning Raizel was not a good option either. No, it was the worst possible thing to do to him.

But how could he face Raizel if he failed to save the sweet children who had been so nice to him? They hadn't known back then whether Frankenstein was involved in their kidnapping or not. And yet, they had chosen to trust them simply because.

Whatever they saw in someone as worthless as him, Frankenstein did not want to let them down.

He folded the note neatly and walked to Raizel's room, intending to slip it below the door and then leave. He hesitated only briefly, and that was enough time for the door to swing open and Raizel's pale face to peek through. There was no accusation in his face, or reproach. He just glanced at the piece of paper in Frankenstein's hand and then back up at him.

"I'll come with you."

"No," Frankenstein replied immediately. "You can't. You're " He hadn't even been able to go back to his child form.

"I won't be a burden, I promise," Raizel said. He opened the door completely and came outside.

"Please," Frankenstein was almost begging. If that was what it took, he had no reservations about going on his knees and pleading.

"I have to go, Frankenstein." Raizel's tone was apologetic yet firm. Frankenstein could readily sympathise with the Lord now, remembering how Raizel had shot down his attempts to do Frankenstein's bidding as well.

Still.

"Should we call Ragar then?" Frankenstein gave up. He could see how much of a strain it was to simply stand up for Raizel. And yet he was determined, so Frankenstein couldn't disrespect his will. He couldn't insult him by constantly asking him to step back. Raizel had always been far too kind to everyone except himself. "For faster transportation."

Raizel nodded. Frankenstein sighed and waited as Ragar materialised from the thin air, not even bothering to make his entrance subtle. Raizel's summons had to have been urgent then. As he understood now, Ragar's speciality was speed and he was the one responsible for doing

all the legwork in the realm of these beings. It was certainly handy that he could still do short-distance teleportation, even though he had given up all his other powers.

There was no need to explain anything to him either. He wasn't fussy like Gejutel. Besides, none of them would disobey Raizel's direct orders.

Raizel and he placed their hands in Ragar's and the world fell away, fading into non-existence for a few brief dizzying seconds, and then rematerialized, depositing them on the sidewalk next to their intended destination. Ragar pulled his hat down and looked at the building.

"Are you sure I should leave, Sir Raizel?" He sounded reluctant.

"Yes." But of course Raizel wouldn't wish him to use his other powers by accident and cause him pain. Ragar, too, could not argue with Raizel, nor did he try unlike Frankenstein. He simply bowed respectfully and disappeared, promising to return to pick them up later.

Frankenstein and Raizel entered the building without further discussion, each able to tell what the other was thinking, and began their rescue mission.

* * *

><p>When Frankenstein had still been in the Organisation, he worked mostly as a chemist. He was gifted with good memory, and he'd had great luck with synthesising and discovering new kinds of poisons. He also dabbled in raising bacteria cultures and spent the rest of the time experimenting in bio-weapons. Of course, he wasn't the only one doing it. There was Dr. Crombel, Dr. Aris, and of course, Ignés. Ignés wasn't a real scientist, since her father refused to let her work on her own. He was overprotective and overindulgent, and that had led to Ignés having a warped personality. Frankenstein suspected that she was warped from the start, however, as he hadn't had that bad an impression from her father, Rocitis. He was no Urokai, after all.

Of course, now he knew that Rocitis had been one of traitors. And the fact that he'd betrayed Raizel and the Lord over Ignés.

They all worked with the Eighth Elder, under his direct supervision. Except, Frankenstein had immunity granted to him by the First Elder, so the Eighth had never been able to get his grubby paws all over Frankenstein.

Frankenstein did not know what had led to the First granting him such a reprieve. It wasn't as if he'd ever gone face to face with him, or was it a her? He had no idea.

Back then, Frankenstein did not really care. All he focused on was to make sure to stay afloat in the petty rivalries between the scientists, the attempts to sabotage each other's research and take it for their own, and then oust anyone who appeared to falter. The entire system was self-defeating and Frankenstein understood, now, why they had never made headway with things.

Frankenstein spent most of the time cooped up in his lab during the day time, and during the night, he'd go out in the training grounds and train his body. He couldn't just be on the top of his game mentally; he also needed his body in good shape in case he ever managed to escape " which he had, eventually.

The chance had come when he and an entire team of grunts was sent with him to a sleepy town on an island in the pacific. There was only indigenous population over there, with scant tourists scattered over the map. It was an ideal place, according to the Eighth to test their latest weapon. If something did happen and they all died, everything could be blamed on a sudden outbreak of disease.

Frankenstein was tasked with mixing the entire suitcase worth of vials " full of the poison he had concocted himself " into the water supply of the town. Fortunately, he knew that a lot of the people who were the original inhabitants drew their water from the river on the island, but the outsiders and people who didn't work the land, they got their water from the water supply. The Eighth had asked to poison the river itself, but Frankenstein had argued that it would require a mass production of a substance that they didn't even know would work. It was better to test the waters first, so as to speak, and then go full-scale.

The eve of their departure, Dr. Crombel came into Frankenstein's private quarters. As a rule, he had enough authority to go anywhere he wanted, but everyone knew that Frankenstein did not enjoy anyone's company. Anyone that was high up in the Organisation, and it was a point of contention often. Frankenstein always drew a sort of perverse joy in how frustrated they all felt with his position and untouchable self, as much of that had been projected by Frankenstein himself.

Frankenstein greeted Crombel perfunctorily, and continued packing his bags. All his journals were secured inside a flash drive, hung around his neck in a dainty silver chain. It once belonged to Tesamu, and well, he did not wish to dwell on that.

"F," Crombel said, leaning against the door and regarding Frankenstein with open hunger in his eyes.

Frankenstein suppressed a shudder and folded more clean laundry so he could place it inside his suitcase. "Dr. Crombel," he returned with ease.

"What a shame that you'll be gone for a while. I asked the First Elder to let you be accompanied by a good bodyguard but as usual, my request was refused." Crombel laughed a little. "I had suggested Yuri, so as to remove my influence, but he wouldn't hear of it."

"The First Elder knows that I'm perfectly capable of defending myself. Yuri works for the security detail of the other Elders, no need to bother with a lowly scientist like me."

"Frankenstein, you devalue yourself too much," Crombel said and sauntered into the room. He placed a hand on the open suitcase and smiled, knife-sharp and poisonous. "I wouldn't send you to such unimportant missions."

"I know," Frankenstein said, finally turning around to look at Crombel. "That you're next in line to become an Elder, Doctor. But I have no desire to become your lackey. I'm happy as it is."

Crombel's grin widened, losing all the humour it might have once contained. He kept it up for a several tense seconds before he tilted his head in acknowledgement and left without another word. Frankenstein closed the suitcase and sat down on his bed, exhausted. It was becoming harder and harder to keep Crombel at bay. The moment he ascended to the seat of an Elder, he would have a lot more clout. And with his cunning, Frankenstein was sure that he'd just wrestle Frankenstein out of the First's hands. He knew that Yuri possibly worked for Crombel too, though he had no proof to back it up.

There was also Dr. Aris, of course. She would have cut him open that one time had it not been for Frankenstein's well-honed reflexes. She hadn't cared for the First Elder's orders either. But she was a brilliant scientist – though Frankenstein had his doubts about that, as her mind was also scrambled by the Eighth Elder to suit his fancy often – so there wasn't much done to punish her either for playing with the First's toy.

It wasn't an active protection either in any case. The First had simply outlined his position within the scientific wing of the Organisation and left it at that. Frankenstein was mostly on his own, and while he used those words freely, he knew that sooner or later something would give.

Hence the current situation.

He flew out of the base next morning, his breakfast sitting in his room congealing untouched, and the taste of bile still lingering in his throat. He was going through the withdrawals of the drugs they kept him on and as result, every nerve inside his body screamed from pain. He'd have to take the injection after the flight to keep it going longer. He wasn't allowed to bring a bigger dose with him outside the base, and that meant he'd have to finish the job and return in three days or risk going into another set of withdrawals.

As it was, he was keeping it for the time when he wouldn't be able to bear with it anymore. He clutched desperately at the small case placed on the next seat and looked steadily out of the window. The plane was mostly empty, all the members of his team in the class below. He outranked them by far and they wouldn't dare sit in the same space as him, even though he was known to be nicer to the people on the lower rungs of Organisation's hierarchy.

He threw up twice before the plane finally landed and he was hit by the tropical heat as soon as they deplaned. At least it helped conceal the sweat beading on his brow and the clamminess of his skin. The feeling of malaise only deepened as he looked at all the people around him in the resort itself where he'd be staying. He knew he was going to be responsible for their fates in the next twenty four hours, and the knowledge sat like a heavy rock inside his gut.

Frankenstein didn't eat that day either, because the mere thought of food was making him retch. The withdrawal symptoms were getting worse

and worse but he didn't want to give in and use the drug. He'd be okay then, but it would come at the expense of his mind and conscience. He knew that once he took it, his morality would be compromised. He'd do as he'd been told to do, without qualms, and certainly, in his younger days, he'd resorted to the numbing effect of the drug.

Except later when he was able to think right, he'd realised just how casually he had sacrificed hundreds – even thousands of people without remorse. He'd done it by wilfully blinding himself. So he'd always take the drug with him, only taking it once the mission was accomplished. He didn't want to forget or look away. He didn't want to forget his sins like he'd forgotten other things.

He spent his evening cooped inside his room, typing on his laptop to record the events until now and tried not to move around too much. At eleven in the night, one of his men knocked on his door and signalled him to start the mission. Frankenstein put on his clothes, hung the flash drive from his neck and went to the overhead water tank. It was perched atop a hill next to the resort and next to it was a steep fall into the jungles below.

As the men worked to unscrew the lid open, Frankenstein stared desolately out at the expanse of green treetops dark under the faint moonlight. It was hard to stand, though the stiff breeze helped dry his sweat and ground him. His mouth tasted foul. And he wondered, not for the first time, why he did this to himself. He knew why, had justified to himself, but when it all came down to it, it was tempting to take the easy way out. Who would blame Frankenstein for being weak?

Well, except for himself, that is.

Frankenstein sighed a little and opened his briefcase. The vials were arranged inside a frame to keep them intact, and he brought out three of them – about a quarter of them, that was – and cracked the fragile glass neck on the edge of the water tank. Pouring them wasn't strictly his job, but he didn't want to taint the hands of others with his sin. He was the one who had made it, so he might as well go all the way and finish the job.

They came down from the hill afterwards, and Frankenstein collapsed the moment he returned to the room, unable to take the drug as he'd planned to.

The next morning he woke to an uproar. He dragged himself to the window, groggy with sleep and weak with the constant onslaught of pain from withdrawal, and saw that the front of the hotel was littered with corpses. The experiment was a huge success. The bodies were disfigured by boils, and a fetid stench wafted from them, making Frankenstein gag even so far above. Just a few millilitres of this stuff, and the scale of devastation was beyond his comprehension.

Frankenstein sank to his knees and spent the morning with his face buried in his knees. He didn't feel sick, nor did he cry. There was only emptiness inside him where once his humanity might have dwelt. The only thing he could count as relief was that nobody had the formula for his latest invention. He'd promised to log it once he deemed it a success – and what a great achievement this was.

The relief was short-lived, he knew, because the moment he stepped back into the fold of his base, he'd be forced to log and reproduce the stuff upon demand. If he refused, he'd be forcefully drugged and made to comply, and that hadn't happened for several years already. No, he couldn't go back. He couldn't. The Organisation had started to research into bioweapons only lately, and if this thing went live, they could hold entire cities hostage if they so chose.

But where could he go also? On this isolated island with no way out without attracting the attention of other agents. Besides, how far could he go without the drug anyway? The drug. Frankenstein looked at it, feeling fury build up inside him. He snatched the tiny case and smashed it against the chair, breaking it open and the small bottle of colourless liquid fell out. It smashed upon impact with the ground and the drug spilled wantonly on the floor. Frankenstein watched it with a sick sort of fascination as he knew that he'd thrown away his only chance at oblivion, but he knew the cost. He had always known.

He couldn't stay here.

Frankenstein staggered to the door. There was one of the guards from his team stationed outside. He looked at Frankenstein in concern but Frankenstein waved him away, saying he wanted to go to the water tank to investigate. The man acquiesced, but he followed Frankenstein anyway. It didn't matter. Not now.

The breeze was even stronger today and Frankenstein stood to the side, leaning on the railings as his guard went to work, unbolting the lid and trying to open it. When he was sufficiently occupied, Frankenstein looked below, at the sheer drop and an entire sea of green. If he got lost in that, they might not be able to find him. But to get thereâ€¦|

"Doctor F!" The guard screamed as Frankenstein swayed on his feet, abandoning the tools in his hands to grab at Frankenstein.

But Frankenstein had already pushed his weight behind him, sliding over the railing and breaking the rusted bars under his weight. His stomach dropped as wind whipped his hair past his face. He was falling, about to die â€" but he would die a _free man_, and that was okay.

11. Avarice

Chapter summary (wherein I play fast and loose with the definition of summary lol): There is a big difference between love and obligation.

Please enjoy~

* * *

><p>Fighting Marie was a pain. They had found M-21 and Marie together, with her hands wrapped around his throat and about to choke the life out of him. Their cover must have been blown, Frankenstein realised with growing anxiety. He'd pulled her away and Raizel took M-21 with him to find Jake and the children, leaving him behind with

Marie.<p>

Marie was shocked into inaction after seeing him, and was unable to stop the others from leaving. But by now she'd recovered and anger was clouding her senses palpably.

"You traitor," she said coldly, clenching her fists and getting into a battle stance.

One look at her and Frankenstein could tell she'd been using those other drugs the Organisation manufactured to boost a person's physical prowess for a short period of time, by burning their lifeforce. He'd never taken it personally, but he knew a lot of the weaker members took it, either by choice or by force. The reason that drug existed was the M-series from which M-21 and M-24 belonged; they were the guinea pigs on which the Organisation had tested that drug before rollout. It was Crombel's pet project and even Aris had used it, grudgingly.

Fighting her was going to be difficult. He was immortal, but that didn't mean he could simply win from her on a test of physical strength alone. He could come back to life if he died, but that was if he died. If she just shattered his limbs and left him here, Frankenstein would need a little bit of time to heal up and during that time she would catch up with Raizel and M-21. He had to finish her here, and fast, so that Raizel wasn't forced to use his powers. Which meant the true issue was that of time, rather than of his ability to win. He could win, definitely, but at what cost. No, he had to think of a way to end this fast and join up with Raizel.

As he circled her, dodging her attacks and kept himself on his toes, he could feel something stir in the air around him. It wasn't noticeable at first, but as she kept on landing more blows on him "and he did return each of them with interest, but neither of them were backing down" the atmosphere around them seemed to become thicker and thicker.

Enough that he found himself distracted, eyes catching the vague but slowly solidifying shapes behind Marie. They were dark and dense, and as soon as he noticed it, he became distracted enough to stand there, unmoving. As a result, Marie managed to get into his personal space, and shoved her hand clean through his chest. Frankenstein gasped and reeled from the force of the blow, spitting blood from his mouth, he was aware of the dark shapes coalescing around him. He was unable to see for a moment, and in that instant, they spoke to him.

They were souls. The souls of the people Marie had killed directly or indirectly. As a human who had Raizel's powers inside him, he was able to see them and channel them, if he so wished. They wanted revenge, and Frankenstein's body was the perfect medium for that. It meant surrendering the control of his body to them for a while, and the idea didn't sit well with him. However, the longer he thought about it, gagging on the coppery taste of his blood flooding the mouth, the more danger Raizel would be in. Therefore, the choice was actually simpler than he'd thought.

He was aware of grabbing Marie's hand, though he had no control over it. He crushed her hand in his grip, making her scream. His other hand closed over her throat and broke her neck as if it were a mere twig. It was anticlimactic, almost, the way she died twitching weakly

in his arms. He pulled her hand out and threw her body away, disgusted, but realising that the moment she died he was able to move his limbs again. He was thankful for that.

There was no more time to waste on Marie's fate, though. He had to go help Raizel. However, by the time he got there, Jake was already dead and M-24 was lying on the side in a crumpled heap, M-21 sobbing over him. The children lay to the side, passed out " thankfully, and Raizel stood in the middle of it all, tall and regal, but the shadow of his pain still dogging him.

And then, right in front of his eyes, Raizel went and kneeled beside M-24, placing his hand over M-24's forehead and began to glow. M-21 stared at him in horror, and Frankenstein did too, though for entirely different reasons. He had defeated Marie, but he was unable to help Raizel, and now _this_.

'_Don't worry,' _Raizel's voice floated into his mind, trying to soothe him and calm him down. '_I'm not going to make him immortal. Just repairing the damage he has sustained so that he may live_.'

It was true, too, because he didn't need the wings or any of the other fanfare he'd used with Frankenstein. The precise moment when M-24's breathing restarted, though, was when Raizel's body tottered backwards and Frankenstein was beside him. He wrapped his arms around Raizel's frame and crushed him to his chest, not even caring that they had an audience.

He wasn't going to let Raizel fade away " not in front of his eyes, not like _this_. Not when he was too weak to protect them both.

Raizel placed his hand over Frankenstein's arm and leaned into him, pressing his head to Frankenstein's cheek. "I'm fine. Don't worry yourself so much."

"Okay," Frankenstein told him, burying his face into Raizel's hair and taking a deep breath. "Okay," he repeated, though he felt anything _but_ that.

* * *

><p>They ended up dropping the kids on a park bench next to a police station. It wasn't that difficult considering the time of the night, and they also made sure to cover them up with blankets before leaving. Frankenstein wished to take them home and fuss over them, but he knew that wouldn't lead to anything good. Besides, they had company.<p>

M-21 and M-24 was sitting in the back of Gejutel's CitroÃ«n, huddling under another pair of blankets. They were too stunned to ask questions, though Frankenstein could tell they had _many_. He asked Gejutel to drive them home " his and Raizel's home, and took the faster route with Ragar. He had kept an iron grip on Raizel the entire time, and he only let go when Ragar deposited them in their living room, gave them a surreptitious look and disappeared, affording them the privacy they needed.

The moment he was gone, Raizel sagged in his arms and rested his weight entirely on Frankenstein's chest, and Frankenstein was happy

to support him, though it hurt him to see Raizel like this.

"Are you all right?" He asked, though it was a silly question at best.

He felt Raizel nod into his chest. A gentle hand came to rest atop the hole in his clothing, tracing the edge of the bloodstain left behind from Marie's attack. He could feel Raizel's relief as well a tinge of regret. He could understand the former â€" he was also glad to be alive after that encounter, but what caused the _latter_?

"It must have been painful," Raizel clarified, answering the question in his mind.

"Not really," Frankenstein said. "I've felt worse things, trust me."

That only seemed to distress Raizel further, so Frankenstein scrambled for another topic and landed on something he knew would help. "Would you like to eat some ramyeon?"

"Yes." Raizel's tone was sweet enough to make Frankenstein put other things out of his mind for the time being.

M-21 and M-24 arrived in the wee hours of the morning, still terrified out of their wits â€" Gejutel's forceful temperament had done them no favours â€" and they walked into Frankenstein's house as if they were walking to their deaths. It was going to be slightly more difficult than he'd first presumed. They had seen Raizel display his powers to dispatch someone â€" something even Frankenstein hadn't had a chance to witness yet. So it was understandable that they were scared, even if their fear made Raizel sad.

He herded them to the couch and sat them down, serving them hot tea right away. M-21 was still a little worse for wear, but M-24 was completely healthy, physically, at least, so that was good. Frankenstein did not have medical supplies here, since neither he nor Raizel needed it. He might need them now, and he made a mental note to ask Ragar to bring some over next time.

"I know you two are rather shaken up," Frankenstein began, standing next to Raizel's chair and put his hand on Raizel's shoulder. "But I'm not going to hold you prisoner here. You're free to go whenever you wish to. Of course, I'd like it if you two are recovered before that, but should you want to leave right now, that can be arranged."

They both looked up at him at that, instead of staring at Raizel. This was the first time they'd seen him in his adult-form, so they were both confused and suspicious and Frankenstein couldn't blame them.

M-24 clutched at his battered hat â€" he had rescued that from the rubble before leaving â€" and looked distinctly uncomfortable. He cleared his throat a couple of times, but M-21 beat him to the punch by speaking first, "He saved M-24's life."

"Yes," Frankenstein said.

M-21 lowered his head, struggling visibly with words and clenched his

hands. So, it was obvious that M-24 had to pick up the conversation where it had left off.

"Thank you," he murmured hoarsely and bent the hat even more out of shape. "But I'm guessing it wasn't something he should have done."

Frankenstein winced. "Perhaps not, but it's not something you should worry about. I'm glad he saved you." It wasn't a lie either.

The hat wasn't going to survive this encounter at this rate. He knew he shouldn't be fixating on that, but the open rawness of M-21 and M-24's expression was too much to bear at this moment. It resembled his all too much when Raizel had rescued him, at a much greater cost. He didn't want to think about that. Not in the least.

"I've been wondering," M-21 broke the uncomfortable silence then. "But is he the child who was with you that time, or am I slowly losing my mind?"

"He is," Frankenstein said. He reached out to refill their cups so they had something else to focus on momentarily, at least. "As you can guess, he's not really human."

"We did guess that," M-21 said dryly and took his fresh cup of tea. It seemed to help. "The Union has people like him too, doesn't it?"

"Yes." As much as it hurt to admit. Frankenstein knew who they were too, now, and that didn't help. Not in the least. If he could only get his hands on them—

"It doesn't hurt to sit next to him anymore," M-24 said, abandoning the hat in favour of his cup.

"That's because right now my powers are far too diminished to irritate your senses," Raizel spoke, eyes distant.

Frankenstein ignored the pang in his chest and put on a reassuring smile for the benefit of M-21 and M-24. "And you get used to it eventually, since his aura isn't meant to harm you. When the knowledge sinks in, your psychic defences won't kick in. It took me a couple of weeks to get used to them, too."

"Huh, all right. That makes sense."

"If you want to rest," Frankenstein said, collecting their empty cups. "You can take one of the rooms in the house. Just leave the two on the right side upstairs, as they are ours."

They glanced at each other, and then at Raizel and him, though the way they were thinking had changed significantly since they'd arrived. They weren't exactly at ease, but their hearts had seemed to settle a little. After all they had been through — and Frankenstein had a fairly good idea exactly what as he knew Crombel well — they still had it in them to trust a being of power to some extent. They were more generous than Frankenstein would have been in their situation.

It wasn't like they knew how much Raizel had put on the line to save

them, and it was best if they didn't ever find out, as unlikely as that was should they remain here. He didn't want them to feel indebted and let it weigh on their conscience. They had been through too much to feel that saving them wasn't the right decision, because it wasn't. If Raizel hadn't done it, Frankenstein would have, no matter the cost.

"Why did you save someone like us?" M-24 spoke, startling both Frankenstein and M-21 as neither of them could have expected that.

But in hindsight, it made sense as M-24's mind had been prodded by them just as Frankenstein's had been, unlike M-21, so it wasn't a surprise that he'd picked up on Frankenstein's line of thought.

"If I can save someone, I will," Raizel said, tone solemn and unflinching.

"We were the reason the children got roped into this mess." M-24's voice was full of anguish and he couldn't meet their eyes. "If not for us â€"

"You two risked yourselves to protect the children, for that I'm grateful," Raizel said softly. He put his cup down and stood up, walking up to where M-24 sat. M-24 was a little skittish but he did not recoil at Raizel's approach, so that was good. Raizel placed his hand over M-24's shoulder, mirroring the way Frankenstein had kept his on Raizel's shoulder earlier. He'd picked up on the gesture as meant to be soothing and was imitating it.

Frankenstein closed his eyes and took a deep, steadying breath. His world was changing constantly, opening up and becoming kinder, and that was all thanks to Raizel. And the same Raizel was now extending that kindness to others, less privileged people than him, and all Frankenstein could feel was a deep-seated sense of relief. It couldn't undo the wrongs the Organisation had done, but baby steps. It wasn't Raizel's power that saved him â€" it was his compassion and gentle heart. It had saved Frankenstein's soul and he wanted to save Raizel in turn, not in gratitude.

It was out of love.

* * *

><p>When both M-21 and M-24 had retired to one of the empty rooms, Frankenstein returned downstairs again to see Raizel standing in front of one of the French windows in the house and staring wistfully at the world outside. He couldn't go out until he was able to assume the form of a child again, not just because of cover story purposes, but he was far too weak for that kind of thing. Frankenstein bit the inside of his cheek and went to stand behind him, just wanting to be there as he couldn't do anything else for Raizel.<p>

Raizel turned his head a little to acknowledge him and then resumed his gazing, the wistfulness melting into something warmer, softer. "I'm sorry," Raizel told him in the intervening silence.

"You have nothing to be sorry for," Frankenstein said, voice thick with regret and grief. There had to be something he could do to save this person, there had to be because Frankenstein refused to

accept a reality where Raizel no longer existed.

"Earlier, you ended up communicating with the souls of that person's victims, did you not?" Raizel asked to change the topic, noticing Frankenstein's state of mind.

"I think so, yes." Because of everything else that happened, he'd forgotten about that until now. "I'm guessing it's because of you?"

"Yes, you can see and feel them because of me, forgive me."

"No, that actually helped me settle the matter faster, so I'm grateful."

Raizel frowned at him. "No, you shouldn't be. That power is far too volatile and unpredictable for a human such as yourself. Too dangerous. I do not doubt your abilities, only the fact that nature of the dead is very unpredictable. The number of kills that woman had wasn't high enough to introduce chaos, but if you end up facing the others from the same organisation, there will be instances where the sheer amount of souls will overwhelm you."

He hadn't thought of that, and he did not like the sound of it either because that time he hadn't sought them out. No, they had come after him instead.

"They may not surrender the control of your body once they possess you," Raizel was saying. "I no longer have the authority to guide them back to the otherworld, so they might take advantage of that."

"Then I just need to learn how to channel their power through my will, right?" Frankenstein said. "The bunch I ran into was able to find peace because Marie was dead. Maybe the others can too. If you can't help them, maybe I can in your stead."

Raizel looked stricken. "It's not something you have to even think about."

But he had thought of that, and the more he considered it, the better it sounded. "It's not an obligation, of course. I'm grateful to you, of course, you saved my life. But I won't belittle your sacrifice by wanting to pay you back. And not because there's no way I can return the favour, anyway. I want to help you because that's something I want to do. It's rather simple."

The deep crimson of Raizel's eyes was so much more striking in the early light of the dawn as Raizel stared at him, unable to formulate a response to Frankenstein's declaration. It made Frankenstein cup his cheeks and draw him closer. He resembled a child again and it tugged at Frankenstein's instincts.

"I'm doing this because I'm a selfish, cruel man. I've trampled over thousands of lives to survive â€" I should have just died rather than continued this existence the moment I realised what I was being made to do. I cannot excuse my past behaviour, even if I was under their influence. No, and because I'm that selfish, I need you by my side. Not because of what you are, but because of what you mean to me. I want you to live just as you had wanted me to live."

The cheeks under his palm grew warmer as Frankenstein's words sank in. Raizel was visibly affected, though he was still silent, Frankenstein did not mind that. They did not need words " but words were important, he knew that, and so he made sure to give them to Raizel right now.

"Can you grant this selfish request of mine?"

Raizel's presence was like a balm to his soul, and if it was greedy to want him near always, Frankenstein was willing to be called that. Besides, it wasn't the only reason he desired Raizel's continued existence; it was just the most egotistic one.

"I will, if I can," Raizel said finally, cheeks still dusted with pink and eyes hooded.

Frankenstein could no longer resist it. He leaned forward and pressed his lips to Raizel's forehead, just for a moment. When he pulled back, his lips tingled from the sudden transfer of power and Raizel's body disappeared in a sudden bright flash of light. Frankenstein blinked, and when the spots cleared from his vision, he found himself looking at Raizel's child form again, who looked as stunned as Frankenstein felt.

12. The Most Important Thing

In which Gejutel is a pain in the ass for Frankenstein.

I'm sorry this took a while! _

* * *

><p>M-21 and M-24 took to child Raizel with a lot more alacrity than his adult form, much to Frankenstein's amusement. Considering he'd displayed the exact same behaviour, he wasn't surprised in the least. He had a feeling that Raizel's current form was perhaps designed " not on purpose, of course " to invoke maximum amount of protective feelings. If it could melt his heart, he could do the same for many others and M-21 and M-24 weren't exactly immune to it. They were kinder, sweeter around him, though they hadn't forgotten whatever he'd shown them while taking care of Jake. There was a hint of wariness still present.<p>

The first thing Frankenstein did was to make space for a medical room in one of the emptier rooms of the house, having Ragar help him with setting it up. He didn't get a lot of equipment, just enough to take care of various kinds of injuries, stocked up on medicines and arranged for a space where M-24 could detox without hurting himself or others. He knew that the withdrawals would hit sooner or later, and he wanted to get it over with as soon as possible. Raizel had mended his body, but whatever impurities were present beforehand hadn't been erased.

He didn't enjoy strapping M-24's body down, and from the looks of it, he did not either, inevitable though it was. M-21 hovered next to him the entire time, and when he backed off, the first thing M-21 did was to take his friend's house. Frankenstein looked at it sadly and said, "He might break your hand if you're not careful " he won't have a

lot of awareness when the withdrawal hits."

"It doesn't matter," M-21 said, not looking away from M-24.

Frankenstein nodded and left, trying to stave off the curious ache in his chest. At least they had each other â€" it was probably the source of their strength and courage that allowed them to step away from the Organisation the moment they could. Helped them retain the goodness of their hearts, and not end up become a cynical bastard like him. Frankenstein might have retained his innocence too, had only Tesamu â€"

"Frankenstein," Raizel spoke, small fingers circling his wrist and heading off that line of thought.

"Yes?" Frankenstein asked, lowering his arm so that Raizel didn't have to reach up to hold onto him.

"How is he?"

Frankenstein pinched the edge of his nose and glanced at the papers in his hand. "He's okay at the moment, the pain is bearable and he's not feeling too sick. Of course, it won't be the case come nightfall."

Raizel frowned.

"I can't give him any painkillers, not sure how they'd react to the drugs already in his system. We have to wait it out." He crouched down and cupped Raizel's hands in his, squeezing them gently. "Do you want to stay with them?"

"Won't he mind?" Raizel asked, hope wavering in his eyes.

"You can ask him if you can stay, of course. I'm sure he's already getting used to your presence, so it shouldn't aggravate his condition." Raizel had become attached to those two just as quickly, as well, and Frankenstein could feel his concern for them press against the back of his mind.

Usually Raizel was subtler than that.

He led Raizel by the hand and nudged him forward, watching from the doorway as Raizel approached M-24 hesitantly and asked his permission to stay nearby. M-24 smiled at him, eyes crinkling with fondness even though his lips were stretched thin from pain. Frankenstein brought him a chair and left all of them to it. It wasn't until he'd climbed down and entered the kitchen that he felt the weak flare of Raizel's powers. He snapped his head up to look at the ceiling below the sickbay. He had so little left, and every time he used them, it hurt, and yet he couldn't stand to watch M-24 suffer under his roof. It wouldn't completely ease all of M-24's agony, but it would help, certainly and Raizel gambled with his life on that slim chance.

And Frankenstein couldn't begrudge him that. Even if he wanted to, he couldn't, because of how happy it made Raizel to see M-24 breathe easier. Frankenstein realised belatedly that he'd have to get better at healing people or else Raizel would continue to spend his precious life to protect the victims of the Organisation and it would get them

nowhere.

He sighed and turned the coffeemaker off, making a note to take up an entirely new field of study. He had the perfect instrument to test it on, too, without the issue of consequences, thanks to Raizel's generosity.

* * *

><p>Frankenstein stepped out of the local bakery with his purchase of fresh bread in hand, adjusting the bags carefully against his chest and was about to start walking towards his home that a police car stopped right next to the sidewalk. Frankenstein did not pay that much attention to it until the window rolled down to reveal a familiar face.<p>

"Officer Yonsu?" Frankenstein greeted pleasantly, appearing appropriately surprised.

She wasn't fooled. "Mr. Lee, do you think you have some time?"

Frankenstein looked at the baguette popping from his paper bag and shook his head. "Not really, I have to get back home and start on dinner."

"Then can we talk at your house?" Yonsu pressed, eyes sharp and calculating. If Frankenstein gave her ground, she'd definitely keep accusing him, but if he resisted too much she would get unduly suspicious.

"No," he said firmly and made a show of thinking things over before saying, "Well, what is it? Can you talk about it here?"

"It's about the children you rescued," she said, moving away from the window and unlocking the car door so that the talk could proceed right here, making him wonder if that had been the objective from the get-go.

Frankenstein's heart sank. Did something happen to those kids again? "What of them?" He asked in a carefully controlled voice. It wouldn't do to let her know that he was worrying.

"They were kidnapped," she said, stepping out of the car and leaned against the vehicle, arranging her posture to display that she was the one in control in this situation. She was trying just as hard as Frankenstein, and neither of them was succeeding all that much.

"Again?" Frankenstein hazarded, letting surprise bleed into his tone and expression. He just really hoped it wasn't a third time, because that would be absurd. "How did that happen?"

"We don't know." Yonsu gritted her teeth. He couldn't imagine the beating her pride must have taken at that admission. "We recovered them safely though."

Frankenstein breathed a sigh of relief, sagging a little and looked at his shoes for a moment. Then he glanced up, settling on a hard expression. "And why are you here? I doubt you'd come all this way

just to let me know about their well-being."

"Well, I thought you'd like to see them," Yonsu said with an air of nonchalance. She wasn't a bad actor, except Frankenstein could see right through her as he was privy to more than she did. "They were injured a little, especially that kid Shinwoo."

"This isn't an invitation, is it, officer Yonsu?" Frankenstein asked, dropping all pretence. He was aware that Shinwoo had been injured rather badly, and it had chafed to abandon him on the street. "You still suspect it was me."

"Yes, I do." At least she admitted it, Frankenstein could respect that.

"So you want to lead back to the children that you accuse me kidnapping?" Frankenstein asked, raising his eyebrow. "Do you think they'd identify me or something if I go there?"

Yonsu shook her head. "I know you hadn't left the town on the day it happened, and the kids described completely different people when I asked them. However," she paused for emphasis, before resuming: "You could have had someone else to do it for you. I won't arrest you or anything â€œ"

"That's a given, isn't it, considering you don't have a warrant to do so, right?"

Yonsu bristled and crossed her arms, unmoving. "Yes, all I want is that you're somewhere I can see as long as those kids are still in this country. Once they are well enough to leave, I'll let you go."

"You realise that isn't exactly legal, because you'd be holding me on a kind of house arrest based on nothing more than a vague suspicion." Frankenstein pointed out, keeping his voice low so that the passers-by wouldn't realise what they'd been talking about. This was a small town and rumours could spread like wildfire if he let it. Yonsu was counting on that, or else she'd have never agreed to talk here in the open.

Yonsu's face took on a slightly sly expression. "It won't be house arrest. You can bring your housemates with you, if you want. There are more people living with you now than before, isn't that so, Mr. Lee?"

Frankenstein didn't reply at first. He had of course run into problems with the law enforcement during his time at the Organisation, but they always had more clout so he always escaped without issues. That was no longer the case and Yonsu was persistent. She had good senses, just no way of discerning that what she'd sensed wasn't the right thing to go after. If she dragged M-21 and M-24 into this, it was possible the children would identify them. M-24 was still suffering from withdrawals and was in no state to travel anywhere. That wasn't even counting the extra stress they would go through should they find out about this.

Making up his mind, Frankenstein said, "No need. They are sick â€œ staying here because of my employer while they recover."

"The father of that child you have been entrusted with?" Yonsu asked.

"No, he's Raizel's guardian." He couldn't envision that guy as Raizel's father no matter how hard he tried. Though he wasn't aware of their cover story, there was no way he could have said yes to that with a straight face.

"I see," Yonsu said. "I'll pick you up tomorrow, let's say at eleven sharp?"

"Right," said Frankenstein. "Eleven. I might as well see the children and make sure they are all right." He knew he'd confirmed at least some of Yonsu's suspicions by agreeing, but he had no idea what else to do. He could keep refusing and risk dragging his patients into this mess, or he could put up with it and deal with the consequences later.

They parted ways there, with Frankenstein stewing with enough rage to break something. It wasn't enough that M-24 was there, suffering right under his roof and Raizel was using his powers to keep him stable: no, he was being coerced into going to London under suspicion, and he'd be closely watched. He couldn't back out, however, without destroying the fragile peace Raizel had achieved here. They probably suspected that Raizel was either being held hostage or he was someone who was thoroughly involved in shady criminal activities. They couldn't be more wrong, but.

He wanted to take Raizel along with him. But then what would happen to the house and the houseguests they had? He supposed he could ask someone to keep an eye, but then he didn't want M-21 or M-24 to think he didn't trust them. Even if his intention was to leave someone to guard them, he didn't want them to think they were being kept under watch or held prisoner " he had more sense than Detective Yonsu.

He couldn't come to a decision by the time he reached home, and when he let himself in, he was greeted by Raizel's worried face. He was upstairs, having left his seat by M-24's side, and Frankenstein couldn't feel the slow drain of power from Raizel. So either M-24 was doing better than he had a couple of hours before, or Raizel had sensed the turmoil in Frankenstein's mind and came to see him instead.

"How's M-24," asked Frankenstein, putting the bread away and cleaning up the kitchen, if only out of habit. It wasn't dirty in the least, but it helped settle his mind to clean it.

Raizel had trailed after him into the kitchen and stood at the side, out of Frankenstein's way, but still in his sight. "Not that well," he said, softly. "There's poison yet in his system that is taking its time " around two to three more days."

That was a long time to spend in constant pain and misery: Frankenstein knew, because he'd been through it himself, at least partially. He'd been too injured and too close to death to completely appreciate the full brunt of withdrawal, but it had made a bad situation even worse. It still hadn't taken him as long as M-24 was taking, because, he supposed, Frankenstein was a prized possession of the Organisation " they wouldn't dare put too many chemicals into

his body and risk killing him. M-24 did not receive the same courtesy.

"I'll have to go to London," Frankenstein informed him, leaning over the sink and trying not to think too much about everything. He felt just a little overwhelmed by everything.

"For how long?" Raizel asked. He walked up to Frankenstein and placed his hand gently on Frankenstein's back.

"I'm not sure. They suspect we were behind the kidnappings, and they have threatened these two if I don't cooperate. The kids are at a hospital, recovering, and when they are healthy enough to fly, I can come back."

"I'll go with you," Raizel said.

Frankenstein glanced back at his earnest face. "But what of M-24? Are you all right with leaving him here?"

"Gejutel can take my place. He's the only one who won't feel the punishment of using his powers without permission."

"How so?" Frankenstein asked, puzzled. Wasn't it the same for all of these people? Why was Gejutel special?

"Because he's still working for the Lord, the current Lord, that is. He hasn't abandoned his position or sought retirement. That's why he can use his powers â€" not freely, but as long as the Previous Lord makes a request of him, he can spare some of it. It's something of a loophole," Raizel said.

"Because he can't move according to his will, but he can act upon the tiny window of opportunity this provides him?" Frankenstein asked, trying to understand how these people worked. He had a theory to formulate and a Raizel to save, after all.

"Yes," Raizel said. "He understands that it's the only way he can meddle into the affairs of humans without attracting impeachment and death."

"So he has some free will, then?"

Raizel appeared conflicted. "We all have free will, of course. It's just that we cannot act upon it unless we break the rules completely, and when we do, we're punished."

Wasn't that more cruel, Frankenstein thought, to be able to think for yourself but still be forced to stand by and watch? Wasn't that exactly what Frankenstein had been put through at the hands of the Organisation? He still retained his heart, but over his body he'd had no control and was forced to participate in so many things that he did not like. They were similar, then, in so many ways.

"Who makes these rules? The Lord?" But if he did, wouldn't he have done something about it when Raizel's life was in jeopardy? Why take such a roundabout way to save him, abandoning his authority to come hang around on earth so that Raizel did not fade away.

"No," Raizel shook his head a little. "The Lord enforces them, and I

was the one who punished for their violations. It's because of my failure that we have come to this point. Had I still been up there, I could have taken the offenders out without any issues."

"Not like you would have enjoyed it, would you?" Frankenstein said, reaching for the kettle and setting it to boil. "Even if it's your duty, you're not the kind of person who enjoys killing."

"It's not about enjoyment," Raizel said in a solemn voice. "Duty is duty, and I failed in performing it. The consequences are mine to bear, not the humanity's."

Frankenstein turned around and looked at Raizel contemplatively. "What did you do that was counted as a dereliction of duty?" There was no one as sincere, as steadfast and self-sacrificing as Raizel, so what could have driven him to abandon his post as the bringer of death?

Raizel looked away. Frankenstein felt guilt stab at his heart and he bent down, almost right away, and took Raizel's hands in his. "No, never mind. I'm sorry for prying. Would you like some tea?"

Not like Raizel would ever say no to tea, and if he did someday, Frankenstein would assume that the world was ending that day "and what could have been a better day to have tea, however?"

* * *

><p>M-24 and M-21 did not take well to Gejutel, predictably so. They had spent some time together in the car previously, and Gejutel clearly hadn't left a good impression on him. But still, he was the only one he could ask without causing significant trouble to them. Besides, it had been Raizel who had asked Emsworth "Frankenstein still thought of him like that from time to time" who had in turn made the request. Gejutel stood like a silent sentinel in the corner of the room as M-21 eyed him with wariness. M-24 was out for the time being, but while he was still awake, he'd only cringed away from Gejutel's piercing stare.<p>

Raizel wasn't going to say anything and the two people under his care were far too intimidated and tired to take Gejutel on. It fell upon Frankenstein's shoulders to mitigate the situation. He supposed to he could have some fun riling up an all-powerful being and see where it got him. He was certain Gejutel wouldn't hurt him, but he wouldn't mind taking him on for a bout or two: he did have his new powers to test and refine.

Gejutel's eyes snapped open at the first hint of hostility and he glared at Frankenstein. But Frankenstein wasn't an easy man to intimidate; he crossed the floor in few easy strides and patted Gejutel's chest. "Loosen up, won't you? You're scaring them." He pointed at M-21 and M-24. M-21 looked like he wanted to protest what Frankenstein had said, but he wisely kept his mouth shut.

"I don't see why we're wasting so much time over a couple of humans, especially Sir Raizel in his condition."

"Wait, what?" M-21 said before Frankenstein could change the topic. Of all the things he could have said, he chose the worst possible one.

"Nothing," Frankenstein said firmly and scowled at Gejutel. So much for not having free will: it didn't stop him from running his mouth.

Gejutel wasn't perturbed, however, nor did he take the hint. "Sir Raizel has taken it upon himself to soothe your friend's torment. It causes him to suffer in your friend's stead."

Colour drained from M-21's face as he looked between the assembled, before he bowed his head and struggled with the information he'd been given. M-21 and M-24 were different from Frankenstein " they hadn't chosen to join the Organisation, they had that right stolen from them, along with their names and identities, their pasts. Their lives had never held a lot of value to anyone except their comrades, and for them to learn that their existence itself was a nuisance to someone " seemingly more important than them. Frankenstein clenched his fist.

"I'm " I'm sorry," M-21 said. "But please, let us impose on you awhile longer, if possible. Once M-24 recovers we'll leave, we promise." His voice shook but determination didn't leave his face. "Or you could use me for whatever you want " if someone like me can be of any help. Just let him go."

"We didn't save you to exploit you," Frankenstein said before Gejutel could say something worse and piss him off enough to fight in his own house, destroying things he'd rather not destroy. He'd paid for all of this from his paycheque, not that someone like Gejutel could understand any of that. "We aren't doing you favour and we need nothing in return. Ignore this offensive old man."

The said offensive old man wrinkled his nose in distaste.

"Whatever I did," Raizel said, finally breaking his silence. "I did by my own wish " you bear no responsibility."

M-21 was quiet for a while, eyes fixed on M-24's pale face. The tension in the room was thick enough to cut with a knife, and for once, Frankenstein didn't know what he could do or say to make it better. He wanted to yell at Gejutel, but what would that achieve? The only thing left to do was to leave, and let the situation resolve itself. However, M-21 had other ideas.

"Um," he began, awkward and fumbling in his speech, "I know it's not my place to say anything when you've done so much for both of us. We're not ungrateful, however," M-21 looked up and stared straight at Raizel. "You don't have to do anything that causes you pain. I have no right to lecture you, but think of the feelings of the people you are trying to save by hurting yourself."

Another hush fell over the room, but it was no longer an awkward one. Raizel looked stunned, for the lack of a better word, and Frankenstein couldn't believe what he was hearing, whereas Gejutel looked unbelievably _smug_ " the bastard. Had that been his plan all along?

"You are an important person, unlike us " I'm sure there are a lot of people who hold you dear." M-21 glanced at both Frankenstein and Gejutel. "If you can't consider our feelings, at least think of

theirs. When you save someone at the cost of yourself, they might not always be happy. Back when we were in the Union, sometimes our comrades â€" others from the M-series â€" they put themselves into danger to shield the rest of us. They saved us, but they died faster than the others. I understand the pain of being left behind. M-24 won't die, thanks to you, but you have done enough. I'm sorry."

M-21 was ashen-faced and he was trembling, just a little, from the fear of what such a powerful being would do to him for all the disrespect, and it wasn't the fear for himself. No, it was for M-24's sake, and yet he had run his mouth regardless. Frankenstein didn't know whether to admire M-21's courage or feel envious that he never could muster it to say so to Raizel. No, he had simply let Raizel do whatever he wanted because he couldn't bear to say such things to Raizel's face.

"M-21 is right," Frankenstein said, picking up the cue right away. "I'm grateful for what you have done for me, and in return, all I ask of you is to value yourself more. I know you consider everyone's life important, and you respect their wills and you want nothing more to make sure everything is right in the world â€" but I've said this before, too, you're not responsible for everything that goes wrong. Nobody, not even you, can take on that kind of responsibility. Please, try to live a bit more freely, if possible."

Raizel blinked. He did not say anything in response, but his feelings were writ plainly on his normally pale and expressionless face. He fidgeted, just a tiny bit, probably not knowing how to absorb everything that had been said. Frankenstein cleared his throat, drawing attention to himself.

"Right then, with that being said, Gejutel, please take care of these two and the house. If something breaks," Frankenstein eyed him menacingly. "I'll hold you personally responsible." He sent him an unpleasant smile â€" without the edge that was there before. Nobody could call Frankenstein an ungrateful man. "Let's go."

He took Raizel's hand in his, leaving the house together, and if Raizel's grip on his hand was a little tighter than usual, he made no comment on it.

End
file.